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David would take his harp and play before the king

The BOOK of LEGENDS

V.2

TALES FROM THE TALMUD AND MIDRASH

BY

HYMAN E. GOLDIN

AUTHOR OF

"MISHNAH", "HOLIDAY TALES",
"THREE KINGS", ETC.

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THE BOOK OF LEGENDS

VOLUME II

CHAPTER I

THE WATERS OF REBELLION

1. *The Dearth of Water*

N the tenth day of the month of Nissan, Miriam died in the wilderness of Kadesh-Barnea. As soon as she died, the well that had provided Israel with water during their march through the desert, rolled away, mingled with the rocks of the desert, and disappeared. A dearth of water followed, and, while Moses and Aaron were plunged into deep grief for their sister's death, a mob of people collected to wrangle with them because of the lack of water.

Moses saw the multitude of people approaching from the distance and said to his brother Aaron: "What may all this multitude want?"

"The people have become aware of our loss," said Aaron, "and they are coming to express their sympathy."

"Nay, brother, the people are not coming for that purpose," said Moses, "for they are not under

the leadership of their elders, but are moving in a disorderly manner."

As they were discussing, the multitude approached and spoke to Moses: "Weep not for the death of a single person, but weep for the entire people of Israel whom you have brought forth from the land of Egypt to perish of thirst in the desert."

"Pray tell me what has happened that you speak thus to me?" asked Moses in astonishment.

"Why," said the people, "no sooner did Miriam die than the rock which had rolled after us and supplied us with water, vanished, and now we and our cattle are doomed to die of thirst in the desert."

"The people are in distress themselves," said God, "yet they have regard for the suffering of their cattle, therefore I will have pity on them and provide them with water out of a rock."

Moses and Aaron made no reply to the people, but hastened to the sanctuary to pray to God for His people. God immediately appeared to Moses and said to him: "Moses, what art thou doing now in the Tabernacle? Go with thy brother Aaron and speak to the rock that it may give forth water."

2. *Aaron and Moses Punished*

Moses took the holy rod which was in the Tabernacle, and, accompanied by Aaron and followed

by all Israel, he went to the rock to get water from it. He approached a great number of rocks and could not ascertain which was the rock destined to yield water for the people. He at last fixed his gaze upon one of the rocks and told the people that he would get them water from it.

The grumblers went about now inciting the people against Moses, saying to them: "If it is true that God has appeared to Moses and told him to get water out of a rock, why does he choose this one out of so many rocks? If God is with him, let him produce water from a rock of our choosing. We know that the son of Amram was once a shepherd of Jethro's flock, and all shepherds are acquainted with the different qualities of rocks. Moses therefore knows that this rock contains water, but he is unable to get water out of a different rock."

Moses never addressed the people in harsh terms, but this time he was overcome by wrath and he shouted at the people of Israel: "O you madmen, you stiffnecked people, think you that out of the rock you have chosen we shall be able to bring forth water? I vow that I shall make water flow only out of the rock I have chosen."

Carried away by his anger, Moses struck the rock he had chosen instead of speaking to it, as God had commanded him to do. As soon as Moses struck the rock with his staff, the rock sent forth but a few drops of water. Moses now waxed

angrier still and he said to the rock: "Is this for the sucklings and for those that are weaned from milk?" He then raised his staff and smote the rock a second time, and blood gushed forth from it. "This rock brings forth nothing but blood," Moses reported to God.

"Why hast thou failed to do My bidding?" said God to the rock, "and gavest forth blood instead of water?"

"Because Moses struck me twice," answered the rock.

"Why hast thou smitten the rock, when I ordered thee but to speak to it?" said God to Moses. "Furthermore, thou hast spoken harshly to My people and hast abused them." God then ordered the rock to give forth water and not blood, and all the people had enough water for themselves and for their cattle.

After that, God said to Moses and Aaron: "Ye believed not in Me and smote the rock instead of speaking to it as I had commanded you, and thereby ye failed to sanctify Me in the eyes of the people. Therefore ye shall not bring this people into the land which I have promised to give to them."

"Indeed I have sinned against thee, O God," said Moses, "but as for Aaron, what has he done to deserve so severe a punishment?"

"Because he was with thee," replied God, "and he failed to remind thee of My command."

"But people hearing of our doom," pleaded Moses, "will say that we too were as bad as the generation that died in the wilderness, and therefore shared the same fate with them."

"Therefore," said God, "I will cause to be written down in the Scriptures the real reason why you died in the wilderness, so that people may know then that you committed no other sin save the one mentioned there."

Chapter II

THE DEATH OF AARON

1. *The Last Day of Aaron's Life*

HEN the time approached for Aaron to die, God said to Moses: "My faithful servant, I have an important matter to inform thee of."

"What is it, O Almighty God?" asked Moses.

"The day has come when thy brother Aaron is to be gathered unto his people. Go therefore and tell him that the day of his death is at hand. Speak gently to him, comfort him and tell him that his son Eleazar will succeed him to the high-priesthood after his death."

This sad news grieved Moses greatly, and he wept all through that night.

Now it was customary during the forty years march in the desert for the people to gather together daily in the presence of the elders. Then, under the leadership of the elders, they would appear before Aaron and Eleazar. Then they would all go to the tent of Moses to present to him their morning greetings. On this day, however, Moses summoned Eleazar before him and said to

him: "Go and call to me the elders and the princes, for I have a message from the Lord to convey to them."

Moses, followed by the elders and the princes and all Israel, went to the tent of Aaron. Aaron became very much disturbed upon seeing Moses change his usual custom and he asked: "What is the cause of all this?"

"God has commanded me to bring a message to you," replied Moses.

"Pray, tell me what it may be," said Aaron.

"Wait until we are out of doors," said Moses. Aaron thereupon donned his eight priestly garments, and all went out. And in this manner they marched on to the Tabernacle: Aaron in the center, Moses on his right, Eleazar at his left, the elders and the princes at both sides, and the rest of the people following them.

When they arrived at the Tabernacle, Aaron wished to enter, but Moses prevented him, saying: "We shall now go beyond the camp." Outside of the camp, Aaron asked: "Pray tell me the message God has given you."

"Wait till we reach the mountain of Hor," Moses answered.

2. *Aaron's Popularity*

When the people saw Aaron walk in the center of the group they rejoiced immensely, for they loved him better than even Moses himself. He

was known to all Israel as "Aaron, the man of peace."

Ever since Aaron had realized that he had brought about the transgression of Israel by making the golden calf, he did everything in his power to atone for the sin. He would go from house to house and whenever he found one who did not know how to recite the prayers, he would teach him how to pray. If he found one who was unable to understand the laws of the Torah, he would explain them to him until he was able to understand them well.

The name "Peacemaker," which Aaron acquired among the Israelites, he certainly deserved, for he always strove to make peace among them. Whenever he found one who was extremely wicked and who would cause quarrels among relatives or friends, Aaron would visit him, become his friend, and teach him how to cultivate a kindly disposition. And Aaron himself was love and kindness personified. Never did he fail with his kind and peaceful disposition to influence his pupils.

If there was a quarrel between two learned men or between two ignorant men, Aaron was the one who would go about from one enemy's house to the other's until he succeeded in making peace between them. If there was a quarrel between a man and his wife, Aaron would visit their home daily, determine the cause of the quarrel, and then make peace between them.

No wonder, then, that Aaron was very popular among the people. And when they saw that Aaron was so greatly honored by Moses they rejoiced immensely, and followed them with great interest and admiration.

Having arrived at the foot of the mountain, Moses said to the people, the elders and the princes: "Remain here until we return to you. Aaron, Eleazar and I will go to the top of the mount, and shall return when we shall have heard the Divine revelation." Thereupon all three now ascended.

3. *The Death of Aaron*

When at the top of the mountain, Aaron said to Moses: "Pray tell me now the message of God."

Moses wished to inform his brother that death was awaiting him, but he did not know how to go about it. At length he said to him: "Aaron, my brother, did God entrust anything into your keeping?"

"Yes," replied Aaron, "God entrusted into my keeping the altar, the table and the shewbread."

"God will now demand back from you all that He has given into your charge," said Moses.

"And what else, pray, has God entrusted to me besides the things I have mentioned?" asked Aaron.

"God has also entrusted a light into your charge," said Moses.

"Not only one light has He entrusted to me," said Aaron, "but all the seven lights of the candlestick which now burn in the sanctuary."

While thus conversing, a cave opened up suddenly before them. Moses requested his brother to enter, and Aaron went in immediately. Moses now wished to execute the command of God to strip Aaron of his priestly robes and put them upon Eleazar his son, but Moses did not want to disclose it to Aaron. He therefore said to him: "My brother, it is not proper to enter this cave while wearing priestly garments, for they may become unclean." Aaron replied: "You are right, my brother." Moses then stripped Aaron of the four garments of the high-priest, and put them upon Eleazar.

Moses then said to Eleazar: "Wait for us here outside of the cave until we return." In the cave Moses and Aaron beheld a couch spread, a table prepared, and candles lit, while angels surrounded the couch.

"How long, my brother, will you conceal from me the message of God?" asked Aaron. "Pray, tell it to me whether it contain good tidings or evil, even if it refer to my death."

"Verily, God spoke to me concerning your death, brother," said Moses, "but I feared to make it known to you. I pray that my death were as yours! I know that my death will not be as yours.

For when our sister Miriam died, you and I buried her; when you die, I shall bury you; but when I die, who will bury me? For I shall have neither brother nor sister. When you die, your sons will inherit your holy office; but when I die, strangers will inherit my place." With these and similar words, Moses comforted his brother and Aaron lay down upon the adorned couch. As soon as Aaron had removed all his priestly garments, heavenly clouds came down, enwrapped his body and caused it to shine with a celestial light. God then kissed Aaron and took his soul.

4. *All Israel Mourns the Loss*

Moses left the cave, and when Eleazar saw him return alone he asked: "O master, where is my father?"

"He has entered Paradise," replied Moses.

When the people at the foot of the mountain saw Moses and Eleazar return without Aaron, they were greatly embittered. "It is impossible," they argued, "that a man who had once overcome the Angel of Death should now be overcome by him." Some people expressed it as their opinion that Moses had killed his brother because he was envious of his great popularity. Others, again, ventured the guess that Eleazar had killed his father so that he might succeed him as high-priest. They approached Moses and Eleazar and said to

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them: "Where is our beloved Aaron? What have you done to him? You had better return him to us, lest you die."

Moses then prayed to God that He clear him and Eleazar of such baseless suspicion. God then said to the angels: "Lift up on high the bier upon which lies My beloved Aaron, so that Israel may know that he is dead and may not lay hands upon Moses and Eleazar."

The Angels opened the cave, brought forth the bier upon which Aaron lay and lifted it on high. All Israel then saw Aaron's bier floating in the air, and heard the angels proclaiming: "The law of truth was in his mouth; let him come in peace; let him come in peace."

The Israelites, now convinced that Aaron was dead, wept bitterly for him and cried: "The pious man has departed from our midst! Alas, the man of peace is no more!"

Chapter III

THE WARS WAGED BY MOSES

1. *The War with the Amalekites*

AS soon as Aaron died, the cloud of glory vanished from the camp of Israel, and the children of Israel were inspired with great fear, because the cloud was a protection against hostile attacks. The sons of Esau soon heard of the disappearance of the clouds and sent word to the Amalekites, saying: "You know that we have succeeded in harming Israel; now come join us and together we shall conquer them."

"But how, alas! shall I be able to contend with Israel?" asked Amalek.

"Clothe all your fighting men in Canaanite costume," replied Esau, "and let your men speak their language, so that when the Israelites pray to their God that He deliver them from the hands of the Canaanites their prayers will not affect you, for you are Amalekites and not Canaanites. And besides know you that the cloud of glory has vanished from their camp, and is no longer with them."

The Amalekites followed the advice of the sons of Esau, disguised their fighting men, and went out to wage war against the Israelites. The Israelites were unable to tell with whom they were fighting, for the faces of the enemy were like those of the Amalekites, while their language and dress were like those of the Canaanites. They therefore prayed to God, and said: "O Lord of the world! We know not with whom we are fighting, whether with Amalek or with Canaan, but whichever nation it is, pray deliver them into our hands." God listened to their prayer, and the Amalekites suffered defeat at the hands of the Israelites.

2. *The Brazen Serpent*

When the Israelites approached the land of Edom, Moses sent ambassadors of peace to the king of the Edomites, saying: "Pray permit us to pass through your land on our way to Canaan. We will march on the highways only, we will turn neither to the right nor to the left, and we will buy from you all we need, even water."

The king of Edom refused to let the Israelites pass through his land, and God warned Moses not to wage war against him. Now the Israelites were forced to march all around the land of Edom. Weary of their forty years of marching and disappointed in that they now had to march back again when they were nearing their goal, they murmured against Moses saying: "Wherefore have you

brought us forth from the land of Egypt to die in this horrible wilderness where there is neither water nor bread, and our souls are beginning to loathe the manna."

Thereupon a voice was heard coming from heaven, saying: "Come hither and behold, O ye men! Come hither and hearken, ye creatures of flesh! In the beginning of things I cursed the serpent with the words, 'Dust shalt thou eat,' yet it complained not of its food. But ye, My people for whom I have caused manna to rain down from heaven, a food that possesses every conceivable flavor, ye do murmur against Me because of it. Let now the serpent come, that complained not, even though all its food tasted like dust, and let it bite those who murmur though they have food that possesses every conceivable taste."

Now during the forty years' march of the Israelites, the serpents and the poisonous scorpions had been burned by the cloud of glory so that they might not harm the Israelites. This protection was now removed, and the serpents began biting the people so terribly that the poison burned the souls of those whom the serpents attacked.

The people, conscious of their guilt, came to Moses and said to him: "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and against you; pray to the Lord, that He may remove the serpents from our midst." Moses immediately forgave the people their sin, and he prayed to God for them.

God told Moses to make a serpent of brass, and put it upon a pole, so that every one that was bitten might look upon it and live. Moses did as God had bidden him, and whoever was bitten by a serpent, if he raised his head heavenwards, looked at the serpent of brass and prayed to God for help, he was healed; but if he merely looked at the serpent of brass and gave no thought to God, he perished.

3. *At Arnon*

The Amorites learned that the Israelites would have to pass through the valley of Arnon. This valley was formed by two lofty mountains, one of which was full of caves, while the other consisted entirely of pointed rocks. The Amorites assembled in great numbers and hid in the caves, with the intention of attacking and destroying the Israelites unexpectedly while the latter were passing through the narrow valley.

It was, however, God's will that Israel survive and come to the promised land. He therefore wrought a great miracle for them. He caused the rocky mountain to move so closely to the other, that the pointed rocks of the one entered into the caves of the other, and all the Amorites that were concealed within them were crushed.

When the Israelites came near Arnon, they found no valley there at all, but merely a high mountain over which they crossed, not knowing of

He who looked at the serpent of brass was healed

the great miracle God had performed for them. There were two lepers who were not permitted to stay within the camp, but who followed Israel in the rear. These lepers noticed streams of blood gush forth from the mountains, and they ran and notified the Israelites. The Israelites returned and beheld thousands of their enemies lying crushed between the mountains. Israel then sang a song of praise to the Lord for the miracle He had wrought for them.

4. *Sihon, the King of the Amorites*

Sihon, the king of the Amorites, and his brother Og, the king of Bashan, were the sons of Ahiah, whose father Shemhazai was one of the fallen angels. Sihon was a giant of marvelous strength, and he was taller than any tower in the whole world. He was also very fleet of foot, and therefore he was called Sihon, "foal," for his true name was Arad.

Moses greatly feared to make war against this giant and his mighty warriors. God assured Moses of victory, and Moses therefore no longer had any cause to fear Sihon. But he nevertheless said: "Let me send ambassadors of peace to Sihon to request him to permit Israel to pass through his land."

"I commanded thee to go forth and wage war upon Sihon, and thou wishest to send ambassadors of peace to him!" God reproved Moses.

"I have only desired to follow Thy example, O

Lord," replied Moses. "When it was Thy wish to deliver Israel from the land of Egypt, Thou couldst have consumed the whole land with a flash of Thy lightning, yet Thou chosest instead to send me to Pharaoh with a message requesting him to let the Israelites go out of his land. And when it was Thy will to bestow Thy Torah upon the world Thou offeredst it to the heathen nations before giving it to Israel."

"Thy words have found grace in Mine eyes," said God. "Now therefore I command the children of Israel not to wage war hereafter upon any nation without first making it an offer of peace, and to go to war only if the offer is refused."

Moses then sent ambassadors to Sihon with the message: "Pray permit us to pass through your land. We will walk only on highways, and we will even pay for the water we shall use."

Sihon, in reply to the message sent by Moses, gathered his army and went out to fight Israel. God fought on the side of the Israelites, and they defeated Sihon and took possession of his land.

5. *Og, the King of Bashan*

Og, the giant brother of Sihon, although but a distance of one day's travel from him, did not come to his aid, because he felt sure that his brother could take care of Moses and the Israelites himself. It was Og who in the war of the four kings against the five, had informed Abraham that his

nephew Lot had been taken captive. As a reward, God had granted him life for five hundred years more.

The giant was so tall that he could sit on the walls of the city with his feet reaching the ground. He never made use of a wooden chair or bed, as these would have broken down under his weight, but he sat upon iron chairs and slept upon iron beds. The Israelites reached the outskirts of Edrei, the capital of Bashan, toward nightfall. On the following day, Moses arose in the gray of the morning to prepare for the attack, but on looking toward the city walls, he cried in amazement: "Behold, in the night, they have built up a new wall about the city!" When the mist of the morning had vanished, Moses saw that it was not a wall built on top of the old one, but only the giant **Og** who was sitting upon the wall with his feet touching the ground.

Moses feared to wage war against this giant, but God assured him that he would conquer Og as he had conquered Og's brother Sihon.

When the giant discovered that the camp of Israel was three parasangs in circumference, he pulled up a mountain of three parasangs, laid it upon his head, and came marching in the direction of the camp of Israel to hurl the mountain upon them. But God caused ants to perforate the mountain, so that it slipped down on Og's neck. The giant tried to shake the mountain off, but his

teeth suddenly extended and projected in all directions, so as to prevent the mountain from slipping off. The giant now remained standing before the camp of Israel with the mountain on his head, unable to throw or shake it off. When Moses saw this, he took an axe twelve cubits long, leaped ten cubits into the air, and dealt a blow upon Og's ankle which made him stumble. The mountain came down upon him and caused his death. The entire land of Bashan now fell into the hands of the Israelites.

Chapter IV

BALAAM

1. *Balak, King of Moab, Invites Balaam*

HEN Balak, the king of Moab, heard of the victories won by the Israelites, against Sihon and Og, he went to the Midianites and said to them: "Moses, the great leader of Israel, was raised in your land, and you are undoubtedly familiar with him. Can you tell us wherein lies the great and marvelous strength of Moses?"

"His strength abides in his mouth," the Midianites replied.

"Then," said the Moabites, "we shall oppose him with a man whose strength lies in his mouth as well."

The king of Moab then summoned messengers and said to them: "Go to Balaam and tell him that Balak, the king of Moab, desires that he come and curse Moses and his people. Tell him that not only will I be grateful to him if he succeeds in destroying all Israel, but all the Egyptians and the Canaanites will cast themselves at his feet in gratitude. For the Israelites have already de-

stroyed the mighty kings Sihon and Og, the guardians of the whole land, and now they are about to destroy us."

Now the messengers that were sent by Balak were great magicians, and on their way to Balaam they said to one another: "If Balaam will immediately comply with the request of Balak and go with us to our land without delay, then we shall know that Balaam will be successful against Moses; but should he hesitate to go, then shall we know that nothing can be expected from him."

When the messengers reached Balaam and delivered to him the message of their king, Balaam answered that he would have to wait until he received instructions from God before he could make any decision. And as God never appears to heathen prophets save at night, he told them to wait over night for his answer. The messengers at once knew that this delay meant failure, but in obedience to their king they remained over the night to receive word from their prophet.

At night, God appeared to Balaam and said to him: "Who are these people with thee?"

"Balak, the king of Moab, has sent them to ask me that I curse Israel for him," answered Balaam.

"Thou shalt not go with these men to curse My people," commanded God.

"If such be Thy wish, then I will go there and bless them," said Balaam.

"They have no need of thy blessing," said God,

"for they are blessed; they need neither thy honey nor thy sting."

2. *Balaam's Ass*

On the following morning Balaam said to the messengers: "God has said to me, 'Go not with these men, for that would be below thy dignity, but tell Balak to send more distinguished ambassadors than these.' "

The envoys returned to their king and delivered to him the message of Balaam, and Balak sent more honorable ambassadors to Balaam. These men he also requested to wait over night for his answer. At night God appeared again to Balaam and said to him: "If these men have come to call thee, go with them, but thou shalt speak only the words which I will put in thy mouth."

Balaam was exceedingly happy when God gave him permission to go with the messengers, and at daybreak, he himself saddled his donkey, although he had many servants. Full of alacrity, Balaam set out for Moab with the messengers of Balak.

God saw the alacrity displayed by the villainous Balaam, and He sent the Angel of Mercy to be a hindrance to him on the way. The angel stood in the way of the ass as she was in the middle of the road, so that she was compelled to turn to one side. The angel was perceived by the ass but not by Balaam, and he was surprised to see the ass turn aside from the road. Then the angel appeared

again at a point where the road was very narrow, so that the ass, on seeing the angel, could turn neither to one side nor the other.

Now this was the ass that had been created on the sixth day of the Creation. God had then endowed her with the gift of speech, but she was not to use it until the opportune moment. On one side of the narrow road the angel was obstructing, there was a heap of stones. The stones said: "We bear witness that, in days of old, Jacob and Laban had made a heap of us in testimony that there would be everlasting peace between them, and that neither of them would pass this heap to do harm to the other." The ass then thrust herself against the heap, and crushed Balaam's foot against the stones. Thus Balaam was punished for having broken the agreement his forefather had made with Jacob.

Balaam stroked the ass to make her walk straight ahead, and when she lay down and would not budge at all, he flew into a rage and smote her. God now opened the mouth of the ass and she said to Balaam: "What have I done to you that you smite me thus?"

"Because you have mocked me," replied Balaam. "I would there were a sword in my hand, for then I would kill you."

"If you can not kill me save with a sword, how do you expect to destroy an entire nation with your mouth?" the ass replied.

The answer of the ass made Balaam look ridiculous in the eyes of the ambassadors. He made no reply to her, but turning to the ambassadors, he said: "This is not my ass, that is why she speaks to me in this manner."

"Why did you not take your horse instead?" asked the ambassadors.

"My horse was pasturing in the field," replied Balaam, "and I did not want to disturb him."

"Am I not your ass upon whom you have ridden all your life long?" interrupted the ass.

"I have used you as a beast of burden and not for the saddle," replied Balaam.

"Nay, upon me have you ridden since your earliest days," said the ass, "and you have always treated me with great affection."

Balaam, having been given the lie by his ass, flew into a rage and wished to smite his ass again, when he suddenly perceived the Angel of Mercy standing with drawn sword in front of him. Balaam was greatly frightened when he heard the angel say to him: "Wherefore hast thou smitten thy poor ass? The Lord sent me to save her from thy cruel hand."

"Indeed I have sinned," said Balaam humbly to the angel, "if it be thy will, I shall return home at once."

"Go with these men," said the angel, "but beware, speak nothing save what God shall put in thy mouth."

"But why hast thou appeared unto me with sword?" asked Balaam of the angel.

"The mouth was given to Jacob," said the angel, "and to Esau and the other nations was given the sword. Because thou hast changed thy profession and hast gone out to fight Israel not with thy sword but with thy mouth, Israel's own weapon, therefore thou shalt find death through the sword, which is thy weapon."

3. *Balaam and Balak*

When Balaam approached the boundary line of the land of Moab, he sent messengers to Balak to announce his arrival, and Balak went forth to the country's border to meet him. "Look here," said Balak to Balaam while pointing to the boundary line, "these borders have been fixed since the days of Noah, and no nation may occupy the realm of another. But Israel ignores all this, and has come here with the intention of destroying the boundaries, even as he has already wiped out the boundaries of Sihon and Og. Now curse me this people so that it may not be able to conquer our land."

Balak then led Balaam into the interior of the land through many big cities where great multitudes of men busied themselves with their daily work. Pointing to these multitudes and to the children that were playing in the streets, he said to Balaam: "Look you, the people that went out

from the land of Egypt design the destruction of these great multitudes of people and these little ones who have done them no harm. Do you not think that for this alone they deserve to be cursed?"

"I can do nothing but that which God will direct me to do," said Balaam. "Now build me seven altars and prepare me seven bullocks and seven rams."

When the altars were erected and Balaam approached to prepare the sacrifices, God appeared to him and said: "What dost thou here?"

"I have erected altars to Thee, and I am about to offer bullocks and rams upon them," answered Balaam.

"Pleasanter by far is to Me the meal of the unleavened bread and the herbs that the Israelites took in Egypt than the bullocks and the rams that thou offerest out of hatred for Israel."

Balak and his princes impatiently awaited the return of Balaam from the altars, and the king in great disappointment said to Balaam: "Why have you not cursed the Israelites as I have requested you?"

"We are both very ungrateful," said Balaam, "to desire to do harm to this people. For had it not been for the sake of their father Abraham, Lot would not have been spared in the destruction of Sodom, and now there would be no Balak, for you are one of Lot's descendants. And had it not been

for Jacob, I, one of Laban's descendants, should not now be on earth, for no sons were born to Laban before Jacob came into his house. What is more, by cursing them I will bring a curse upon myself. For did not God say to Abraham that He would curse those who curse him and that He would bless those who bless him?"

4. *The Curses Turned into Blessings*

God said unto Balaam: "When thou blessest My people, thou shalt raise thy voice so that all the peoples of the earth may hear of the good and the kindness which I have bestowed upon Israel for observing My commandments and walking in My ways, and then these peoples too will abandon their useless idols and join the house of Israel."

When Balaam heard this command of God, he rejoiced greatly, for he thought that the nations of the earth, hearing his exaltation of Israel, would gather and destroy Israel because of jealousy. He began to speak in a loud voice of the great virtues Israel possessed, and of the great laws that God had given them, and he blessed the people instead of cursing them.

"I have called you to curse the people," Balak protested, "and you bless them instead."

"I have told you beforehand that I am unable to do anything but that which God tells me to do," answered the heathen prophet.

"So," remarked Balak mockingly, "you are unable to express your own thoughts or what you wish, but only what God wills."

"Rise up, Balak," replied Balaam to these scornful words, "for you may not remain seated when the word of God is spoken." When Balak arose, Balaam said: "How can I curse a people whose keeper is the Almighty God? A thief can enter a vineyard only when the keeper is asleep, but the keeper of Israel never slumbers."

Balak became angry with Balaam, and said to him: "Is it indeed impossible to find a way of cursing the people that have come forth from Egypt?"

"Do not say, 'A people that has come forth from Egypt,' for it was the great God who has brought them out of the land of Egypt. He gave them laws and statutes on Mount Sinai, and thus distinguished them from all the nations of the world. When they go forth to battle, they practice no magic and rely not upon sorcery, but they have their high priest consult God about the outcome of the combat.

"There is not a people upon this earth that is like Israel. Upon going to sleep, the children of Israel entrust their souls to the Almighty God, and immediately on awakening, and before going to their daily tasks, they say, 'Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' When they go about their business or work they

always invoke God's help. And now, look at their tents, the entrances of which do not face one another, so that one might not look into the tent of the other. Observe all this, O Balak, king of the Moabites, and you too, like me, will proclaim: 'Who is like unto thee, O Israel?'" After blessing Israel, Balaam returned to the land of the Midianites.

5. *Balaam's End*

God said to Moses: "Go and wage war against the Midianites because through the wicked advice of Balaam they had tempted Israel to sin, so that forty-eight thousand Iraelites were killed by a pestilence. After this war thou shalt be gathered unto thy people."

Moses thereupon called to Phinehas and said to him: "Go, gather the people together and wage war upon the Midianites. With you, you shall take the pure golden plate of the mitre, worn by the high priest upon his forehead, and upon which the name of the Lord is engraved. And when you see Balaam flying in the air during the fight, raise your hand so that the side of the plate bearing the Holy Name will face him and this will cause him to fall to the earth."

When Phinehas announced to the people the decree of God, they refused to go to war, saying: "We know that our leader Moses will die soon after the war is over; therefore we will not go to

war with the Midianites so that our leader may live on."

Moses, upon receiving this message through Phinehas, went to the people and said to them: "Pray, do not rebel against the decree of God, but go and fight the Midianites as you were commanded to do."

"We refuse to go to war, because we do not wish to lose you," said the people, "but if you will lead us in battle, we will follow you."

"I can not go to war against them in person," replied Moses, "for when I was a fugitive from Egypt I sought protection in Midian; there I stayed for many years and was protected from the wrath of Pharaoh. But pray, do as God has commanded you."

Phinehas then gathered all the warriors of Israel and waged war upon Midian. The Midianites suffered a complete defeat at the hands of the Israelites, and Balaam tried to escape Israel's power by sorcery. When he saw Phinehas and the leaders approach him he flew into the air. Phinehas held up to Balaam the high priest's gold plate upon which was engraved the name of God, whereupon Balaam fell to the earth and was killed.

Chapter V

THE DEATH OF MOSES

1. *Joshua Chosen as Successor*

FTER the defeat of the Midianites at the hands of Israel, God said to Moses: "Go up to the mountain of Abarim whence thou wilt be able to see the land which I have given to the children of Israel, and then thou wilt die, as thy brother Aaron has died."

"O Lord," pleaded Moses, "thou knowest the spirit of the living, both those that are proud and those that are humble, those that are patient and those that are restive. I am about to depart from this world, I pray thee, appoint a leader over the Israelites that will know how to deal with each man according to his due. Appoint a leader over them, who shall not be like the kings of the heathens that send their legions to war while they themselves remain in their palaces and spend their time in riotous revelry, but one who will go out before the Israelites and in person lead them in battle."

"Thy successor shall be he who has served thee with devotion," said God, "he who has shown thee the greatest veneration; Joshua the son of Nun

shall bring forth My people from the wilderness and take them into the promised land." "Indeed," said Moses, "I have proven him, and he knows how to deal with people of every kind, and he is certainly the man whom I expected to be chosen my successor."

"Take Joshua then," said God, "lay thy hand upon him and bestow of thy spirit upon him, so that the children of Israel may accept him as their leader while thou art still alive, and honor him."

Moses went to Joshua and related to him what God had spoken concerning him. Joshua wept bitterly when the news reached him that his beloved master would soon die in the wilderness, and would not bring Israel into the promised land. "Alas, master, your words have filled me with sorrow. All Israel will join me in praying to God that He may forgive you and allow you to come into the promised land."

"God is not a mortal who is apt to change his mind; His decree must stand," replied Moses.

"But am I the one who deserves to succeed you?" questioned Joshua.

With kindly words Moses induced Joshua to accept the leadership after his death. He then led him before Eleazar the high-priest and before all the people of Israel, and in their presence he laid his hand upon Joshua, and bestowed his spirit upon him. Moses then said to Joshua: "Heed my advice concerning the leadership of Israel, and

God will be with you. Know you that Israel is yet young, and that he has still a great deal to learn. When he sins, do not give vent to your anger. For God himself never was exacting concerning Israel, but always forgave him his sins, although God was many a time provoked to great anger. Now you must rule over Israel as a father rules over his children, and only then will you deserve to be called the 'Leader of Israel.' "

Joshua promised his master to be true to his teachings, and with tears in his eyes and with a heavy heart he accepted the leadership over Israel.

2. *Moses Prays for Suspension of Judgment*

As the days of Moses' life drew near their end, he began to pray to God to forgive his sin and allow him to come to the promised land, saying: "O Lord of the world! Thou in Thy mercy hast chosen me for Thy servant and through me Thou hast shown great and wonderful miracles in the land of Egypt. Now Thou sayest unto me, 'Behold thou wilt die.' Shall my ultimate end likewise be dust and worms as that of any other mortal?"

"No man can escape death," replied God. "Even Adam, who was the work of My own hands, was doomed to die; so how can a man born of woman escape it?"

"O Lord of the world!" said Moses, "to the first

man Thou gavest but one command that could easily be fulfilled, and yet he disobeyed."

"Behold, Abraham who sanctified My name in the world, also died," answered God.

"But from Abraham issued Ishmael, whose descendants arouse Thy anger," argued Moses.

"Isaac who laid his neck upon the altar to be sacrificed as an offering to Me, also died," said God.

"But from Isaac issued Esau who will destroy Thy temple and burn Thy house and exile Thy children," contended Moses.

"From Jacob issued twelve tribes that did not anger Me, and yet he died," said God.

"But his feet never ascended into heaven, and he did not tread the clouds; Thou didst not speak to him face to face, and he did not receive the Torah from Thy hand," Moses persisted.

"Enough, speak no longer to Me of this matter," said God.

"With all Thy creatures, O Lord, Thou dealest according to Thy attribute of mercy, forgiving their sins," pleaded Moses, "but in my case Thou wilt not forgive even a single sin."

"Not once but six times hast thou sinned against Me," said God.

"O Lord of the world!" pleaded Moses again. "How often did Israel sin before Thee, and when I implored Thy mercy for them, Thou forgavest them, but me Thou wilt not forgive."

"Two vows have I registered, one that thou art to die before Israel enters the promised land, and the other one that Israel shall be forgiven and not perish," answered God. "If I am to cancel the first, I will also have to cancel the other, and Israel will have to perish."

"Rather shall Moses and a thousand more of his kind perish," exclaimed Moses, "than a single soul in Israel."

3. *The Last Petition of Moses Refused*

Moses now made a last effort to obtain God's mercy, saying: "Although I never saw the land, I have praised it to the people. Shall I share the lot of the spies who, although they saw the good land, spoke evil of it in the presence of the people? Thou knowest, O Lord, that my desire to enter the promised land is not prompted by a selfish motive. I wish to go there that I may perform all those commandments which are to be performed in the promised land only. Forgive, then, my sin this time and allow me to enter the land. Then all living flesh shall know that Thou art forgiving and merciful."

"Thy sin shall not be forgiven thee," said God, "so that all flesh shall know that the Lord does not even discriminate in favor of him with whom He spoke face to face."

"If it be Thy wish that I do not enter the land

in the capacity of leader of the people," continued Moses, "then let me enter as a plain ordinary member of the people."

"Even this cannot be granted to thee," said God.

"Change me into a beast that eats grass and drinks water, but let me enter the land which Thou hast given to the children of Isarel."

"This, too, must be denied thee," said the Almighty.

"If Thou art unwilling to change me into a beast, then change me into a little bird that picks her daily food wherever she can get it, and toward evening returns to her nest, but let me enter into the promised land," continued Moses.

"Enough, my decree is unalterable!" declared God imperiously.

Upon hearing God's final decision, Moses exclaimed: "The Rock of Ages! All His ways are just!"

"Permit me, O Lord, to make but one request of Thee," said Moses. "Let the heavens be opened and the abyss be rent asunder, so that Thy people may see that there is none besides Thee, O Lord, in the heavens and upon the earth."

Immediately the heavens were opened, the abyss was rent asunder, a great light shone in the dark of the night, and the eyes of all Israel were opened and they saw that neither in the heavens above nor on the earth below is there anything

except the greatness and glory of God. Thereupon all the people exclaimed as one man: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one."

4. *Moses Ready to Die*

Moses then wrote thirteen scrolls of the Torah, twelve for the twelve tribes, and one to be put into the Holy Ark.

When Moses had completed writing the scrolls of the Torah, he went to the tent of Joshua, stood at the entrance and listened to Joshua explaining the Torah to a number of Israelites. Meanwhile more people arrived, and when they beheld Moses standing at the entrance, they ran into the tent and exclaimed: "Alas, you show no respect to our great leader and teacher, if you thus permit him to stand at the entrance of your tent."

Joshua looked toward the entrance, and when he saw Moses standing there, he tore his own garment, and said amid tears: "Pray enter the tent and explain the Torah to your humble servants."

"From this day on," said Moses, "I shall be your disciple."

Moses and Joshua then went to the Tabernacle, but as they entered, a cloud descended and separated them. God then spoke to Joshua, and His words were not audible to Moses. Moses asked Joshua to tell him the word of God, but Joshua replied that God would not permit him to tell of what He had spoken to him.

"Now," said Moses to God, "I am willing to die, but if I cannot cross the Jordan, permit me at least one glimpse of the land."

"This I shall grant thee," said God. "Go up to the top of Mount Pisgah, and from there I will show thee the land of Israel and tell thee of all that will befall the Israelites in later days."

5. *Samael Chastised by Moses*

When God perceived that Moses was ready to die, He said to the angel Gabriel: "Go fetch Me the soul of Moses."

"How can I approach and take the soul of him who has wrought so many miracles?"

"Behold, even Adam, whom My own hands had made, did not escape death," said God.

"O Lord of the world!" said Gabriel, "Adam sinned against Thee, and therefore Thou hast removed Thy glory from him and bestowed it upon Moses, whom Thou lovest."

"Noah, who found favor in My eyes because of his righteousness and simplicity, died likewise," said God.

"Noah saved only himself when Thou broughtest a flood upon the world," argued Gabriel, "nor did he care to pray unto Thee for the lives of the people who were to be destroyed. But Moses, Thy servant, would not go away from Thy presence until Thou saidst unto him that Thou wouldst forgive the people their sin."

"Abraham, too, who was kind and righteous, died. He did not escape death," said God.

"Abraham was indeed a great man, for he gave food to the poor and provided them with their wants, but this was done by him in a settled land, while Moses provided an entire nation with food and this in a wilderness where there was neither food nor drink," said Gabriel.

"But no mortal can escape death; such is My decree," said God.

"O Lord of the world!" said Gabriel, "pray give this mission to anyone it please Thee, but not to me."

God then turned to the angel Michael, and said to him: "Go and fetch Me the soul of Moses."

"How can I presume to approach and take the soul of him who is equal in Thine eyes to sixty myriads of people," answered Michael.

"Go thou then," said God to the angel Zagzagel, "and fetch Me the soul of Moses."

"Lord of the world!" replied Zagzagel, "when Moses came up to heaven to receive the Torah, I was his teacher and he my disciple! how then can I take his soul?"

God then said to the Angel of Death, Samael: "Go and fetch me the soul of Moses."

Samael was greatly pleased with this mission. He took his sword and wrapped himself in wrath, and hastened to Moses. When, however, he beheld the face of Moses and gazed into his eyes,

the radiance of which was equal to that of the sun, he trembled and shrank back.

"Why dost thou stand here? What is thy wish?" asked Moses.

"The God of heaven and earth, who created all souls, has sent me here to take thy soul," replied the Angel of Death.

"I will not give thee my soul; leave me at once," said Moses, "for I am standing here narrating the glory of God."

"The heavens narrate His Glory, and the firmament tells the work of His hands," replied the Angel of Death.

"But I will silence the heavens and the firmament, and I myself will narrate His glory," replied Moses.

"All souls since the creation of the world were delivered into my hands; now pray let me approach thee and take thy soul, too," said the Angel of Death.

"Avaunt, I will not give thee my soul," exclaimed Moses.

Samael now in great terror returned to God and said: "Lord of the world! I am unable to approach the man to whom Thou sentest me."

The wrath of God was now kindled against Samael and He said to him: "Go there again, and fetch Me his soul!"

Samael now drew his sword from its sheath, girded himself in cruelty, and in towering fury

betook himself to Moses. When Moses beheld Samael, he arose in anger, and with the staff, upon which was engraved the Ineffable Name, he set about to drive Samael away. Samael fled in fear, but Moses pursued him and when Moses reached Samael, he struck him with his staff and blinded him. At that very moment a voice from heaven resounded, saying: "Moses, thy last second is at hand."

Moses instantly stood up in prayer, and said: "Lord of the world, be mindful of the day on which Thou didst appear to me in the bush of thorns and didst order me to go to Pharaoh and bring forth Thy people Israel from the land of Egypt; be mindful also of the day on which I ascended into heaven and during forty days partook of neither food nor drink. I pray Thee, Gracious and Merciful God, give not my soul into the hands of the Angel of Death."

Then the heavenly voice resounded again: "Be comforted, I Myself will take thy soul, and I Myself will bury thee."

6. *The Death of Moses*

God revealed Himself to Moses from the highest heaven, and with God descended three angels, Michael, Gabriel and Zagzagel. Michael arranged the couch for Moses, Gabriel spread upon it the white napkin for the head, and Zagzagel the one for the feet.

Then Michael stood on the right side of Moses, Gabriel on his left side, the angel Zagzagel at his feet, and the Majesty of God appeared above his head.

And the Lord said to Moses: "Close thine eyelids."

Moses obeyed.

Then the Lord said: "Press thy hand upon thy heart."

Moses did so.

Then God said, "Place thy feet in order."

Moses performed God's command.

Thereupon the Lord addressed the soul of Moses, and said: "My daughter! For one hundred and twenty years thou hast inhabited this undefiled body of dust. But now thine hour is come; rise and fly to Paradise."

The soul replied: "I know that Thou art the God of spirits and of souls. Thou didst create me and put me into the body of this righteous man. Is there anywhere in the world a body so pure and holy as this one is? During these one hundred and twenty years I learned to love it, and I do not wish to leave it."

God replied: "My daughter, do not hesitate, but come forth, for thine end hath come. I will place thee in the highest heaven and let thee dwell, like the Cherubim and the Seraphim, beneath the throne of Divine Majesty."

But the soul replied: "Lord of the world! I

desire to remain with this righteous man, for he is purer and holier than the very angels. When the angels Azael and Shemhazai descended from heaven to earth, they became corrupt, but the son of Amram, a creature of flesh and blood, has not sinned from the moment he saw the light of day. Let me therefore, I pray Thee, remain where I am."

Then God bent over the face of Moses and kissed him. At once the soul leaped up in joy, and with the kiss of God flew to Paradise.

A sad cloud draped the sky, and the heavens and the earth wailed: "The pious one has been lost from the earth, and there is none more righteous among men."

Joshua tore his garments and lamented: "Help, O Lord, for there are no longer any pious ones, and the faithful have departed from the midst of men."

And all Israel lamented the loss of Moses: "The righteousness of the Lord has he performed, and he has executed His judgment in Israel."

And when all the voices were silenced the Divine Presence proclaimed: "And there hath not arisen a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face."

Chapter VI

CONQUEST OF CANAAN

1. *Joshua*

OSHUA, who was chosen by God to succeed Moses, had, in his infancy, been swallowed up by a whale. Later on he was spewed forth by the sea monster somewhere on the sea coast, and he was picked up by passers-by.

Immediately after the death of Moses the manna ceased to fall. The Israelites came to Joshua and said: "The manna has ceased falling from the heavens, and wherewith shall we nourish our families?"

"Be not alarmed over it," said Joshua; "God will bless the supply you now have, and it shall last until you come to a settled land."

Joshua had been a faithful disciple of Moses and carefully studied his teachings. But immediately after the death of Moses, Joshua forgot many of the laws he had learned, and was unable to decide many questions that were put to him by the children of Israel. The people threatened to take his life, and Joshua appealed to God with

the words: "Pray, O Lord, teach me Thy holy statutes."

"It is futile to teach thee My laws now, for thou wilt not be able to remember them all," replied God. "Go and make war against the Canaanites, so that the people may forget their grievances against thee."

Joshua accordingly went forth and notified the people to lay in a store of food, as within three days they would cross the Jordan to take possession of the promised land.

2. *The Spies*

Joshua called for Caleb and Phinehas and said to them: "Go across the Jordan, spy out the land and particularly the city of Jericho, and bring back word to me. Take some pots with you, and when you enter Jericho you shall walk through the streets and announce, 'Pots, pots for sale! Who wants to buy pots!' Thus the inhabitants of Jericho will not become suspicious of you, and no harm will befall you."

In Jericho Caleb and Phinehas came into the house of a woman, whose name was Rahab, to pass the night there. The king of Jericho had been informed of the presence of the spies, and he sent his bailiffs to Rahab, saying: "Give up the two strangers that came into your house, for they are our enemies and they came to spy out our land."

Rahab brought the two spies up to the roof of

her house and wanted to conceal them there. But Phinehas said to her: "Good woman, do not concern yourself about me, and hide Caleb only; for I was sanctified by God and am like the angels, visible when I wish to be seen, and invisible when I do not."

The spies remained undiscovered. When the king's bailiffs were gone, she went up to the spies and said to them: "I know that your God will deliver Jericho into your hands, for all the inhabitants are stricken with terror because of you. Now swear to me by your God that just as I saved your lives, you will save my life and the lives of my father and mother."

Caleb and Phinehas swore to Rahab in the name of God, and a heavenly voice said: "Because Rahab esteemed her parents and pleaded for their lives, her days shall be prolonged, and she shall become the ancestress of nine prophets."

3. *The Capture of Jericho*

The spies returned safely to Joshua and reported what they had seen and heard in Jericho. Joshua decided to cross the Jordan immediately, and he called together the priests and told them to take the holy Ark and march in front of the people across the Jordan. As soon as the priests bearing the Ark set foot in the Jordan, the waters of the river were piled up to a height of three hundred miles, making a dry passage for the children of

Israel to go across. All the kings of East and West saw this great miracle, and Joshua's name became known all over the world. While standing in the bed of the Jordan, Joshua said to the people: "Only on this condition does the Lord your God help you to cross this river and conquer the land of Canaan, that you all fight against your enemies like one man. If there were any among you who would not help his brethren fight, the waters of the Jordan would descend immediately upon him and drown him." The holy Ark remained in the Jordan until all the people had crossed the river.

The Israelites marched to Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, and there carried out the command of Moses: six of the tribes ascended Mount Gerizim, and six Mount Ebal. The priests and the Levites grouped themselves about the holy Ark in the valley between the two mountains. The Levites turned their faces toward Mount Gerizim and bestowed twelve blessings upon all those who would fulfill the commandments of God, and after each blessing, the people responded, "Amen." Then the Levites turned to Mount Ebal, and pronounced twelve curses upon those who would transgress the commandments of God, and after each malediction the people likewise responded, "Amen."

While crossing the Jordan, the children of Israel picked up very huge stones from the bed of the river, and with these stones they erected an

The walls of Jericho were completely swallowed by the earth

altar on Mount Ebal. The altar was plastered with lime, and upon it the Torah was written in seventy languages, so that all the heathen nations of the world might have an opportunity of learning the Law of God.

Then the Israelites marched toward Jericho. Once a day for six days, on the seventh day seven times, they marched around the city shouting and blowing trumpets all the time. The seventh time that the Israelites marched around it, the walls of Jericho were completely swallowed by the earth, and thus the first city was captured. The conquest of Jericho took place on the Sabbath and therefore Joshua told the people not to take any of the spoils for themselves, but everything taken was to be consecrated to God.

In memory of the first miraculous victory over the enemy, the children of Israel made silver and gold coins, having the picture of an ox on one side and the picture of a reem on the other.

4. *Achan's Crime*

Achan of the tribe of Judah found among the spoils of Jericho an idol which had a golden tongue. He took this idol together with the costly robe that was spread in front of it and hid it in his tent. God was angry with the people because of Achan's action, and when the children of Israel sent mighty warriors to fight against the city of Ai, Jair, the son of Menasseh, perished. Jair had

been very learned in the Torah, and Joshua and the people mourned their great loss. Joshua rent his garments and prostrated himself before the holy Ark from morning until evening, when God said to him: "Arise, wherefore hast thou fallen on thy face? Israel has sinned, and this is the cause of their defeat."

Joshua summoned the high priest from the assembly of the people. Now the high priest wore a plate on his breast in which were set twelve jewels representing the twelve tribes of Israel. When Joshua looked at the precious jewels he noticed that while all the other stones gleamed brightly, the stone representing the tribe of Judah was dim. Joshua accordingly cast lots and Achan was singled out as the one guilty of the crime.

Achan, however, refused to admit the decision of the lots, and he said to Joshua: "Scarcely a month has passed since your teacher Moses has been dead, and you have already gone astray. You have the law laid down by him, that a man's guilt can be proven only by the testimony of two or more witnesses, and you desire to take my life merely after casting lots."

Meanwhile, the Judeans, the tribesmen of Achan, rallied about him, and began disputing the case with Joshua. The other tribes came to the aid of Joshua and were about to attack the tribe of Judah. Then Achan said to himself: "Does it not suffice that I was the cause of one death, shall

I now bring about a civil war and cause more bloodshed?" He confessed his crime to Joshua, and the messengers who were sent by Joshua to the tent of Achan, brought the idol with the golden tongue and the costly garment, and placed them before the people.

Achan was punished with death for his sin, and a heavenly voice was heard saying: "Because thou, Achan, didst confess before the Lord, and wert ready to lose thy life in order to avoid bloodshed, thou shalt not lose thy share in the world to come."

5. *The Great Miracle*

In a second attempt made by the Israelites, the people of Ai suffered defeat. The peoples of Canaan became terror-stricken on account of the great heroism displayed by Joshua and his warriors, and one of them, the Gibeonites, deceived Joshua and the elders of Israel. They came into the camp of Israel clothed with torn and worn out clothes, and told Joshua and the elders that they did not live in Canaan, but had come from a distant land, because the fame of Joshua and his people had spread all over the world, and so they said they had come to make peace with Israel.

Joshua and the elders made peace with the Gibeonites. The other nations became very angry at the Gibeonites when they heard that peace had been made between them and the Israelites, and they gathered their armies to fight against them.

The Gibeonites sent word to Joshua to come to their aid, and Joshua did so, although by this time he knew that the Gibeonites had deceived him.

The enemy was very numerous, but God sent down a hailstorm which caused the death of many Canaanite warriors. Indeed, many more were killed by the hail than by the sword. The battle was waged on Friday. Sabbath was approaching and Joshua was unwilling to leave the battle-field in the middle of the struggle, but at the same time he did not wish to violate the Sabbath. He therefore pronounced the name of the Lord and said to the sun, moon and stars: "Stand still until my people finish fighting their enemies."

"Who are you to give me orders?" asked the sun. "Am I not your superior, in that I was created on the fourth day, while you were created on the sixth?"

Now Joshua had a banner upon which a copy of the Torah was written. He immediately spread this banner out before the sun and said: "In the name of the Lord, I order you to stand still in the heavens."

The sun obeyed the command of Joshua this time, and the sun, the moon and the stars stood still until the enemies of the Israelites suffered a great defeat.

Thirty-one kings were vanquished by Joshua and his warriors, and then the children settled in the land that God had promised Abraham, Isaac

and Jacob to give to their children as an everlasting possession.

6. *The War With the Armenians*

Among the thirty-one kings whom Joshua had conquered, there was one whose son, Shobach by name, was king of Armenia. This king called together the forty-one kings of Persia and Media and said to them: "The Israelites have slain all the kings of Canaan and have taken away their lands. Now let us avenge the blood of our kinsmen, and let us wipe out Joshua and his men from the face of the earth." Thereupon they all united as one man to fight against the children of Israel, and they were joined by the very famous hero Japheth.

The allied kings forwarded a letter to Joshua, which read: "We well know what you have done to our kinsmen. You have killed their people, and devastated their cities. Therefore we, the forty-seven kings of Persia and Media, each with sixty thousand mighty and valiant warriors, and reënforced by the famous hero Japheth, are coming to make war against you. Prepare now for war, and say not afterward that we took you by surprise."

This message reached Joshua just on the day before the Feast of Weeks, and although he was greatly troubled by it, he did not disclose its contents to anyone before the feast was over, so as not to disturb the rejoicing of the people. Imme-

diately after the holiday, he took counsel with his chiefs, and he gave the following reply to the messenger of the king of Armenia: "From Joshua, the servant of God, to Shobach, king of Armenia, who worships images and prostrates himself before idols: You cannot frighten me or my people with your numerous armies, with your chariots or with your horses, for we come in the name of the Lord God of heaven and earth, who wrought miracles for us against Pharaoh, the king of Egypt, and against the mighty kings of Canaan. Stay where you are, and dare not enter the holy land with your idols. Be you prepared to meet me, for within seven days I shall be with you to slay your warriors to a man. If the hero Japheth is with you, we have in our midst the Hero of all heroes, the Highest above all the high."

The king of Armenia became alarmed at the contents of the letter, and he said to the messenger: "Tell me, what kind of people are they?"

"They are all heroes and trained in the ways of war. Their king has the appearance of an angel, and is very tall, standing five ells high." This report alarmed the king still more.

At the end of seven days Joshua appeared with twelve thousand troops. The king of Armenia regretted his own rash action, and was unwilling to meet Joshua's army. But the mother of King Shobach, who was a powerful witch, sent word to her son: "Fear not Joshua and his host. Behold!

I exercise my magic art, and the Israelites are enclosed in seven walls, out of which they shall never be able to get out!"

Joshua, surrounded by seven magic walls, was helpless. He thereupon sent forth a carrier pigeon with a message to Nabiah, the king of the trans-Jordanic tribes. He told him of his bad plight, and urged him to come immediately to his aid and bring the priest Phinehas and the sacred trumpets with him. King Nabiah wasted no time. Upon untying the message from the leg of the pigeon, and reading its contents, he at once called together his army and summoned Phinehas with the sacred trumpets, and set out to relieve Joshua and his army.

Before Nabiah and his men arrived, the mother witch came to King Shobach and said: "Alas, I behold a star arising out of the East, and against this star, my magic art has no effect."

"Why then did you mislead me?" cried out the infuriated king. "Had I not depended upon you, I would have sued for peace. Now you have brought death upon me and upon my people."

King Shobach in his great anger threw his mother down from the wall and she was instantly killed. King Nabiah defeated the hosts of King Shobach, who was killed in battle. Thereupon Phinehas blew the sacred trumpets, and the seven magic walls toppled down, thereby relieving Joshua and his men.

Chapter VII

JUDGES

1. *Kenaz*

FTER the death of Joshua, Kenaz of the tribe of Judah was chosen by lot leader of Israel. He gathered three hundred thousand warriors to make war upon the Amorites, but when he discovered that not all the men were faithful to him, he selected three hundred valiant men, and he said to them: "We will surprise the enemy in a night attack, but you must not disclose this to anybody."

He sent scouts to ascertain the exact position of the enemy as well as the number of troops assembled against him. The scouts came back and reported: "The Amorites are very numerous, and are too powerful for us." But Kenaz was not discouraged by the report, and at midnight, he and his three hundred faithful warriors advanced toward the camp of the Amorites.

When Kenaz came close to the enemy's camp, he said to his men: "Now, you remain here, and when you hear the sound of a trumpet, resume

your march toward the enemy, but if you hear no such sound, return home."

Kenaz then advanced to the camp of the enemy alone, and prayed to God thus: "Let this be a sign whether or not Thou, O Lord, wilt bring salvation to the children of Israel through me: I shall draw my sword from its sheath, and brandish it so that it glitters. If the enemy recognize it as my sword, then I shall know by this that Thou wilt deliver them into my hands; if they do not recognize it as my sword, then I shall know that Thou wilt not bring salvation to Israel through me, because I am sinful."

As Kenaz stood in the midst of the enemy's encampment in the dead of night, he heard one Amorite say to the other: "We should advance against the Israelites. We can defeat our enemy very easily, for they have taken from us our sacred gods, the nymphs. Our gods surely do not wish to remain captives in the hands of the Israelites, and they will therefore cause their defeat." When Kenaz heard these words, the spirit of God came over him. He brandished his sword above his head, and made it glitter. When the Amorites saw a sword glitter in the air, they exclaimed: "This is the sword of Kenaz, who has come to inflict wounds and deal out death. But take courage, you heroes of Canaan, for we know that our gods who are held by Israel will deliver them into our hands."

Kenaz, now convinced that God was with him, threw himself single-handed upon the Amorites and killed forty-five thousand of them. Many thousand Amorites fell at the hands of their own brethren, for God had sent an angel to the aid of Kenaz and he had struck the Amorites with blindness, so that they killed one another.

The sword, with which Kenaz had dealt such a disastrous blow to the enemy, stuck to his hand and he was unable to loosen his grip on it. Suddenly he noticed an Amorite fleeing for dear life. Kenaz stopped the Amorite and asked him for advice about how to loosen the sword from his hand. "Slay a Hebrew, and let the warm blood flow over your hand," advised the Amorite. Kenaz thrust his sword through the Amorite, and his blood freed his hand from the sword.

Kenaz then returned to his three hundred faithful warriors, and found them fast asleep. The men were greatly surprised when they saw, on awakening, that the whole field was littered with the dead bodies of the enemy. "Do not be astonished," said Kenaz to his men. "Are the ways of the Lord like the ways of man? He hath no need of numbers, but only of holiness."

The three hundred warriors, upon returning to the camp of Israel, related what had happened. Kenaz was received with great rejoicing, and all the people gave thanks to God for having designated him as the leader of Israel.

2. *Deborah*

In later years, there was no leader in Israel, and the people left their true God, and worshiped idols. The Lord therefore raised a terrible enemy against them, and that was Jabin, the king of Hazor, who oppressed them mercilessly. But worse than the king himself was his general, Sisera, one of the greatest heroes known to mankind. He had subdued many nations, and no one dared stand up against him. For he had the voice of a lion, and he had nine hundred horses harnessed to his chariot. Men as well as wild beasts were terrified at his approach. Sisera was very boastful and proclaimed that no one in the world was his equal. God then said: "Because thou art so proud of thyself, thou wilt fall by the hand of a woman."

Now there lived a very rich woman in Israel, whose name was Deborah. Her husband Barak was an ignorant man, unversed in the law of God, like most of the men that lived in his time. One day Deborah said to her husband: "Do something that you may deserve the mercy of God. You shall go to Shiloh and take with you the wicks that I am making, and let them be put there in the candle-stick in the Sanctuary, so that they may light the House of God."

Barak would go from time to time to the Sanctuary to put the wicks into the candle-stick, and

Deborah was in the habit of making the wicks thick so that they might burn a long time. God was pleased with Deborah's actions, and He said: "Because thou takest pains to shed light in My house, I will let thy light, thy fame, shine throughout the world."

Thus it happened that the spirit of God came upon Deborah, and she became a prophetess and a judge. She would sit in the open air under a palm tree and there render judgment. Under the leadership of Deborah and her husband Barak, the armies of Sisera were annihilated, and Sisera himself was forced to flee on foot.

In the course of his flight Sisera passed the tent of Jael and she invited him to enter and refresh himself with food and sleep until the evening. Sisera asked Jael for a drink of water, to quench his burning thirst, but she gave him milk instead. He fell sound asleep, for he was weary. The woman then took a wooden spike in her left hand and a hammer in her right hand. She approached the sleeping warrior, and with the hammer she drove the spike into his temple, and thus he died by the hand of a woman.

When many thousands of the army of Sisera lay dead on Mount Tabor, God said to the mountain: "I remember when thou camest unto me and pleadedst that I give the Torah to My children upon thee; but I chose Mount Horeb instead; now I

shall compensate thee, and My prophetess Deborah shall sing her song of praise upon thy summit." Deborah thereupon ascended Mount Tabor and there together with all Israel intoned a song of praise to the Lord for the salvation He had brought to Israel. This hymn is known to this very day as the "Song of Deborah."

3. *Gideon*

Deborah died after having judged the people for forty years. After her death, the children of Israel again forsook the Lord and began worshiping idols. God punished them by delivering them into the hands of the Midianites. The enemy came into the land of Israel and destroyed all the products of the land, and there was no food left in the country. The Israelites were compelled to make secret caves in their fields where they threshed the little wheat that escaped the notice of the Midianites.

At this time there lived an old man of the tribe of Manasseh, whose name was Joash. Joash had a youthful son whose name was Gideon. The old man feared to thresh his grain on the threshing floor because of the Midianites, and he therefore brought his grain into the wine-press to be threshed there.

One day the old man Joash went with Gideon to thresh wheat. Gideon said to his father:

"Father, you are old and feeble, and this work is too hard for you; besides, the Midianites may surprise us. Go home and I will thresh the wheat myself, and if I am attacked by the Midianites, I shall give them battle, and the Lord may do as seems good in His eyes." A heavenly voice was thereupon heard saying: "Because Gideon was a kind son to his father, I will make him a father to My people Israel, and he shall bring salvation to them."

On Passover an angel appeared to Gideon and greeted him thus: "God is with thee, thou mighty man of valor."

Then Gideon replied: "Last night my father related to me all the wondrous works which God had done for His people Israel in Egypt. If our ancestors were righteous men and deserved salvation from the Lord, let God save us from the hand of the cruel enemy for their sake. If our forefathers did not deserve it, and God saved them because He is merciful, then let Him deliver us because of His mercy."

"Thou art worthy, and Israel should be saved for thy sake," said the angel. "Go and with the courage thou possessest deliver Israel from the hand of the Midianites."

Gideon gathered an army, and during the holy day of Passover he defeated the Midianites in battle, and freed the Israelites from the yoke of their cruel oppressors.

4. *Jephthah*

After Gideon's death, the children of Israel again forsook their Lord God, and as a punishment for their sins, God delivered them into the hands of the Ammonites. Jephthah was offered the rulership by the people at Mizpah. At first he refused to accept the offer, but finally he yielded to their supplications and placed himself at the head of the army to wage war against the Ammonites.

Before Jephthah departed for war, he made a vow before God: "If God will deliver the Ammonites into my hands, then whatsoever comes out first to meet me when I return victorious from the war, I will sacrifice as an offering to God."

Jephthah was successful in his war against the Ammonites, and the first one to meet him on his return home was his only daughter, who had come out dancing and singing to greet her father.

"Alas," cried out the grieved parent, "I have indeed been foolish and vowed to sacrifice to the Lord whatever would come out first to meet me, and I cannot take back my vow."

"But God desires not human sacrifices," argued his daughter.

"But I have made a vow that whatever would come out first," replied the unfortunate father; "then it matters not whether it be a human being or not."

"I am ready to die so that you may fulfill your vow," said the daughter. "But remember that our forefather Jacob, too, had made a vow before the Lord to set aside unto Him one tithe of whatever he possessed on his return from the house of Laban. Now God had blessed him with twelve children. Did he sacrifice one tithe of them to fulfill his vow?"

Jephthah would not be persuaded by his daughter's arguments, and his daughter said: "Grant me two months that I may go with my companions upon the mountains and there bewail my lost youth."

When the fate of Jephthah's daughter became known to the people, they went to the high priest Phinehas and said to him: "Pray go to Jephthah, absolve him of his vow and save his daughter from death."

"What! I, a high priest, and the son of a high priest, should humiliate myself and go to Jephthah," said Phinehas.

Then the people went to Jephthah and begged: "Pray, go to the high priest Phinehas; he will save your daughter by annulling your vow."

"What!" exclaimed Jephthah. "I, the chief of the tribes of Israel, the first prince of the land, should humiliate myself and go as one of the common people!"

God was very angry when He heard these haughty words, and He said: "Thus the vain pride

of these two leaders has caused the loss of a young life. Of a truth they shall be punished for it." And their punishment did not escape them. Jephthah died a horrible death, for his body was dismembered limb by limb. As for Phinehas, the holy spirit departed from him, and he had to give up his priestly office.

5. *Ruth*

In those days there came a famine upon the land. Elimelech, a rich and influential man of the tribe of Judah, said to himself: "The people are hungry, and they have no money wherewith to buy bread. They will come to me continually for help, and the gold in my coffers will be diminished." He therefore called for his wife Naomi and his two sons Mahlon and Chilion and said to them: "Let us go to the land of Moab, and stay there until the famine shall pass away from the land."

Elimelech died not long after his arrival in Moab. After his death his two sons married the daughters of Eglon, king of Moab. They withdrew themselves entirely from their needy brothers in Israel, and even forgot the land of their birth. Therefore they did not enjoy their wealth for a long time, and they sank into poverty. And because they continued to walk in their sinful ways, God also took their lives.

Naomi, bereft of her husband and her two youth-

ful sons, resolved to return to her home. Orpah and Ruth, her daughters-in-law, decided to follow Naomi into the land of Israel. Naomi tried to persuade them to remain in Moab, but they insisted on going with her. They accompanied their mother-in-law for a distance of four miles, then Naomi again begged them to return to their homeland, saying: "I am now poor and old and unable to be of any assistance to you." Orpah kissed Naomi, wept bitter tears and took leave of her, but Ruth said that she would not go back to the land of Moab.

"Why do you insist on following me?" said Naomi to Ruth. "There in the land of Israel you will not be able to worship the gods you were worshiping in your land."

"Your God will henceforth be my God," replied Ruth with determination.

"But my daughter, the law of the God of Israel is extremely difficult to obey," sad Naomi. "The one who violates the law of God is punished by the judges of the land in accordance with the degree of his crime; in many instances it even means to be punished with death."

"Your people shall henceforth be my people," replied Ruth with the same firmness.

"My good daughter," pleaded Naomi, "there in the land of Israel, the young women are not accustomed to visit the theatres and circuses of the

heathen, as you have been accustomed to do in your young days."

"Wherever you go, I will go," answered the determined Ruth.

So the two women journeyed together to Bethlehem. They arrived there on the very day on which the wife of Boaz was buried. Now Boaz was related to the family of Naomi and he was moreover a prominent citizen of Bethlehem. The people who were gathered for the funeral saw Naomi as she returned to her home; they were amazed at her changed appearance and said to one another: "Is this the proud and wealthy Naomi? Where are her horses and chariots, and where are her many attendants?"

Naomi and Ruth settled in Bethlehem, and subsisted on the ears of grain which Ruth gleaned in the fields. One day Ruth happened to be gleaning in the field of Boaz. Boaz noticed Ruth's modest demeanor and natural grace, and he admired her greatly. When he learned who she was, he commended her for her devotion to Naomi and for her attachment to the faith of Israel, and invited her to come daily into his fields to glean ears of grain. He also ordered his servants to be gentle to her.

Later on, to the great delight of Naomi, Boaz married the virtuous Ruth, and their union was blessed with a son, Obed the pious, the father of

Jesse, who was the father of David, King of Israel.

6. *Samson*

To Zelalponit the wife of Manoah of the tribe of Dan, a son was born who was named Samson. When Samson grew up, he attained superhuman strength. When the spirit of God came upon him he was able to perform miraculous feats. While the spirit rested upon him, his hair would begin to move and emit a bell-like sound which could be heard far off, and he was able with one stride to cover a distance equal to the distance between Zorah and Estaol.

The first evidence of his wonderful strength he gave when he uprooted two great mountains, and rubbed them against each other. The children of Israel were amazed at the superhuman strength of Samson and they appointed him judge and ruler over them.

One day Samson saw a beautiful maiden of the Philistines and fell in love with her. Upon his return home, he said to his father: "I saw a beautiful maiden among the Philistines; please let me marry her."

"Are there no beautiful maidens in Israel that you are choosing one from the land of the Philistines?" asked the disappointed father. But Samson would not listen to the good advice of his father, and married the girl of the Philistines. This displeased God who said: "Because thou castest away

the advice of thy father, and wentest astray after the desire of thine own eyes to take for thyself a wife from among the Philistines, a day will come when thou wilt fall into the hands of the Philistines and they shall put out thine eyes."

Once upon the return of Samson to his wife, he was told by her father that she had been given away to somebody else as a wife. This enraged the giant, and with the jawbone of an ass he slew one thousand Philistines. After this battle Samson was very thirsty, and he was on the verge of dying from thirst. He prayed to God and water began to flow between his teeth as from a spring, and thus was the hero saved from certain death.

In addition to his great strength, Samson was endowed with exceptional virtues; he was extremely unselfish. He was of great help to the people of Israel, but never asked for anything in return. He refused to accept even the slightest favor that anybody ever extended to him. So he became very popular and beloved of all.

In many battles Samson fought single handed against the Philistines and slew many thousands of the enemy. The Philistines therefore offered a large sum of money to Delilah, Samson's second Philistinian wife, that she entice her husband and find out wherein his great strength lay, so that they might be able to rid themselves of this redoubtable enemy of theirs.

Three times Samson deceived Delilah when she

inquired after the secret of his strength. Each time he told her that if she would do this or that to him he would become as weak as any ordinary man, and each time it was proven that he had told her an untruth. But when she begged him again and again to tell her the real truth, he said to her: "I am a Nazarite of the Lord, and no razor has ever touched my hair." As soon as she heard him mention the name of the Lord, she understood that he had told the truth.

When Samson was fast asleep, she cut off seven locks of his hair, and his strength left him. Thereupon the Philistines took him prisoner, bound him with fetters of brass, and put out his eyes. But he died the death of a hero. Once, when the Philistines were gathered in one of their houses of worship, they called for Samson in order to make sport of him. Samson prayed to God, and He once more gave him his superhuman strength. Samson then took hold of the pillars upon which the house rested and pulled them down. Thus he perished, together with all the Philistines that were gathered in the house of their idol Dagon.

7. *Micah*

In those day there lived a certain man whose name was Micah. He erected a sanctuary and in it he placed idols which the people would come to worship. He himself did not believe in the worship of idols, but he adopted this as an easy

means of earning his livelihood. But strange to say, very often he would even try to dissuade the people from worshiping his idols.

Once, for instance, a man came to Micah with a dove and a lamb and said to him: "Please sacrifice these unto your gods."

"Why sacrifice these?" asked Micah, "when my gods see not and hear not."

"But my wife ordered me not to visit the gods empty-handed," said the stranger.

"Then instead of these beasts, bring me a dish of flour and ten eggs," said Micah, "and I will offer it to my gods." This offering he himself ate.

The worship of the idols erected by Micah increased steadily, and the smoke that ascended from the sacrifices offered to the idols would mingle with the smoke ascending from the sacrifices offered by the Israelites in the house of God at Shilo.

Thereupon the angels presented themselves before the Lord, and said: "O great Lord, the abominable smoke coming up from the house of Micah mingles with the smoke coming up from Thy house. Give us permission and we will destroy the house of idol-worship."

"Behold," said God to the angels, "yonder in the wilderness are many weary wayfarers; their tongues are parched with thirst, and their eyes are heavy because of approaching death. Suddenly they behold a smoke rising at a short distance; they are encouraged by this vision, and exert their

utmost strength to reach the place where the smoke is ascending. There they are cordially received by Micah and are supplied by him with food and drink. Micah is hospitable and with his hospitality he saves the lives of many persons. Know ye that kindness is better than sacrifices and even better than worship unto Me. Let therefore the house of Micah remain in safety."

Chapter VIII

SAMUEL AND SAUL

1. *The Birth of Samuel*

N those days there lived in the mountain of Ephraim a pious man, whose name was Elkanah. He was in the habit of making a yearly pilgrimage with his family to the Tabernacle in Shiloh to worship God. In every town through which he passed, he and his household would make their quarters in the market place. This drew the attention of the inhabitants, who would gather around the group and ask: "Whither are you bound for, and why do you prefer to lodge in the streets?"

"I am going with my family to the house of the Lord at Shiloh," Elkanah would say to the inquirers, "for from there comes forth the law of God. Why should you not join us?"

Elkanah's earnest and simple words never failed to take effect. Every year, in every town, the number of families, who joined him in the pilgrimage, increased. Finally, there was not a single family in any town through which he passed

that did not follow him to Shiloh. Thereupon Elkanah took a new route, and repeated the procedure. Elkanah's arguments were convincing and expressed with gentleness; therefore they never failed of their purpose. In the course of time many thousands of Israelites formed the habit of making a pilgrimage at least once a year to the house of the Lord at Shiloh and there they were instructed in the Law of God by the priests.

Elkanah had two wives, Peninnah and Hannah. Peninnah was the mother of several children, but Hannah was childless. Peninnah took advantage of every opportunity to vex Hannah. In the morning, for instance, when Peninnah would get her children ready for school, her greeting to Hannah would be: "Do you not intend to rise and wash your children, and send them to school?"

The neighbors of Elkanah once rebuked Peninnah: "Why do you thus jeer at Hannah and embitter her life? What harm has she ever done to you?"

"My intentions are good," replied Peninnah; "I want Hannah to be mindful of her childlessness, and bring her to the point of praying fervently to God for children."

One day, when Elkanah and his family were in the house of the Lord at Shiloh, Hannah made a very fervent prayer to God for a son. She entreated thus: "O Lord of hosts, amid this great multitude making their pilgrimage to Thy house

at Shiloh, I see fathers and mothers happy with the children that were born to them. Is it really impossible for Thee, O Lord of heaven and earth, to give me at least one son? Pray have mercy upon Thy handmaid and give her a son, one that will be wise and good."

God was pleased with her prayer and said: "From the day I called into existence the heavens and the earth, there has been no mortal who has called Me by the name 'Lord of hosts' until this unfortunate woman came. And when she prayed for a son, she did not ask for him, riches, might or power, but wisdom and goodness. Therefore I will make her very fruitful, and the first child that shall be born to her shall be as great and honored in Israel as were my servants Moses and Aaron."

When Eli the high priest learned the nature of Hannah's prayer, he dismissed her with this blessing: "Go in peace and may the Lord God grant your prayer and give you a son who will be wise in His ways and acquire great knowledge." This blessing greatly heartened Hannah, and at once her gloom passed away.

One day, a heavenly voice proclaimed that in a short time a child would be born who would become great, and whose name would be Samuel. Each male child that was born thereafter was therefore named by his mother, Samuel, in the hope that he might be the great prophet. As the children grew up, they were closely observed to

determine whether any one of them could be expected to turn out to be the great man whose coming had been heralded. But not one of them showed any signs of greatness until the true Samuel was born to Hannah. He excelled all children in wisdom and in beauty, and he was acknowledged by everybody to be the great prophet of whom the heavenly voice had spoken.

2. *Samuel in the Sanctuary*

When Samuel was two years old, Hannah brought him to the Sanctuary at Shiloh. Upon entering the Sanctuary, Samuel noticed that a priest was being sought to slaughter an animal that was about to be offered as a sacrifice. Little Samuel suggested to the people: "Why look for a priest to slaughter the animal? It may be killed by a non-priest."

This event was reported to Eli the high priest and he ordered that the child be brought to him. Eli admitted that the opinion of little Samuel was right, but Eli was angered at Samuel's boldness in laying down the law without the permission of the high priest. He ordered that the child be punished with death for his crime. Hannah who was still in the Sanctuary pleaded with Eli to save the life of her child. But Eli insisted and said: "Let him die, and I will pray for another in his place."

"I lent him to the Lord," Hannah replied.

"Whatever happens, he belongs neither to me nor to you, but to the Lord."

Eli withdrew his order when he heard the argument advanced by Samuel's mother. Hannah then sang a song of praise to the Lord who had given her this wonderful child.

Hannah gave birth to other children after Samuel, and each time she gave birth to a child, Peninnah her rival, lost two of her children, until eight of her ten children had died.

One day, Peninnah said to Hannah: "I know that I have sinned against you and that I am being punished by the Lord. Now, pray for me, I beg of you, that my sin be forgiven and that the rest of my children be spared." Hannah accordingly prayed to God and her prayer was accepted.

3. *The Capture of the Holy Ark*

The Israelites suffered a great defeat in the war against the Philistines. Thirty thousand men were killed, the two sons of Eli the high priest died, and the Holy Ark, which had accompanied the people to the camp, was captured.

The Philistines took the Ark and brought it into the house of their idol Dagon. They jeered and said: "The God of the Israelites had only ten plagues, and these he expended upon the Egyptians. He no longer has it in His power to do harm."

But God said: "Do ye but wait and see. I will

bring a plague upon you, the like of which hath never been."

This new plague consisted of mice which came from the earth and entered the bellies of the Philistines. The pain caused by the mice was intolerable, and the Philistines called for their magicians and their wise men to advise them what to do with the Ark. The magicians replied: "Take a new wagon and harness thereto two milch cows. Place the Ark upon the wagon and let it go without any one to guide it. Then, if it will by itself turn toward the land of Israel, we shall know that our plague was the work of the God of Israel. If the cows do not go thither, we shall know that it was a mere coincidence." When this was done, the cows went directly toward Beth Shemesh, turning neither to the right nor to the left. The Israelites, upon beholding the Ark in the wagon drawn by the cows, lifted their voices in a song of praise.

4. *The First King*

Samuel, as leader of the Israelites, was very much beloved and respected by his people, but his two sons who were to succeed him were displeasing to Israel. Therefore the Israelites came to their prophet Samuel one day and demanded that he appoint a king over them. Samuel, at first, refused to do so, but upon the advice of God, he granted the request of the people.

Now in those days there lived a hero of the tribe of Benjamin whose name was Kish, and he had a son named Saul. Once it happened that the asses belonging to Kish were lost, and Saul accompanied by a servant went to look for them. They failed to find the asses and Saul said to his servant: "Let us return, for if we linger here my father will worry about us." God thereupon said: "Saul is modest and puts his servant on a level with himself by saying, 'My father will worry about us.' I shall therefore raise him to the high position of king over My people Israel."

Samuel gathered all the people at Mizpah, and there Saul was chosen by lot to be king over Israel. When he was brought before Samuel to be anointed, Saul said: "Who am I that I should be considered worthy of being king over Israel? Pray consult the Urim and Thummim to ascertain whether the lot was correct." The Urim and Thummim were consulted and Saul was proclaimed the chosen ruler of the people.

Saul was beloved by the people, because he was virtuous. He was as free from sin as a one-year-old child. His fame and popularity increased when in the first war during his reign he defeated Nahash, king of the Ammonites. In his next war, this time against the Philistines, his son Jonathan, accompanied only by his armor-bearer, routed the Philistines in the quiet of the night. Saul and his

army then pursued the panic-stricken Philistines and defeated them. Saul proclaimed a fast on that day, and said: "Cursed be the man who will taste any food until the evening." Jonathan did not hear this proclamation and tasted some honey while walking through a forest.

At night, Saul consulted the Urim and Thummim to determine whether he should follow the Philistines, but he received no reply. Saul examined the Urim and Thummim and noticed that all the stones in the breastplate of the high priest were bright, but the one bearing the name Benjamin had lost its brilliancy. By casting lots it was found that Jonathan of the tribe of Benjamin had sinned and therefore the brightness of the stone was dimmed. Jonathan confessed his sin, and Saul was ready to slay his son, but Jonathan was saved by the people who proved to Saul that Jonathan had committed the crime by mistake. The people offered a burnt-offering to atone for the sin committed by Jonathan, and also paid his weight in gold to the sanctuary.

In Saul's campaign against the Amalekites, he disobeyed the command of God by saving the life of Agag, king of the Amalekites, and by allowing the people to take some of the cattle of the Amalekites as booty. Samuel then announced to Saul in the name of God that the throne would be bestowed upon another.

5. *The Anointment of David*

God opened the gates of song, and took the song of birds, the whisper of the forests, the sweet sounds of the clear breezes heard among the leaves, and the singing of the babbling brooks and springs, and out of all these he made a soul which He blew into the nostrils of David. David, before he was born, sang thus: "Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name." When David was born and he saw the sun, the moon and the stars, he sang: "Bless the Lord, all ye His hosts; ye ministers of His, that do His pleasure."

When David grew up he became a shepherd. He was gentle and kind to the flocks entrusted to him by his father Jesse. The young lambs he led to pastures of tender grass; the sheep he led to pastures of less juicy herbs, and to the sturdy rams he gave the tough weeds for food. Then God said: "David is kind and knows how to tend sheep, therefore shall he be the shepherd of my flock Israel."

In the solitude of the hillsides where David tended his father's sheep, he had an opportunity to display his extraordinary strength and courage. One day David encountered a reem fast asleep. He took it for a mountain and began to ascend it. Suddenly the reem awoke, and David found him-

self high up in the air on its horns. David prayed to God that He save him, and vowed to build a temple to God one hundred ells in height, as high as the horns of the reem, if he should be rescued. God hearkened to David's prayer and sent a lion to the scene. The reem was frightened at the sight of the king of beasts, and prostrated himself. David descended from the reem, but was met by the lion. God then sent a deer upon the scene, and the lion pursued the deer. Thus was David saved from the lion as well as from the reem.

One day God said to Samuel: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul? Fill thy horn with oil and go to Jesse of Bethlehem, and anoint one of his sons as ruler over My people in the place of Saul."

Upon Samuel's arrival at the house of Jesse, he saw Jesse's first-born son Eliab. Samuel was overwhelmed by the wonderful appearance of Eliab and thought that he was the chosen of God. God then said to Samuel: "When thou first metest Saul, thou saidst, 'I am the seer,' and thou wast too sure of thyself; now thou art proven to be unable to foresee all things." Eliab was quick-tempered, and it was for that reason that he was not the chosen of God. When the other sons of Jesse passed in turn before the prophet, he tried to pour the holy oil on the head of each one to anoint one of them as a ruler over Israel, but the oil was swallowed by the horn and it totally disappeared. Finally David was brought to Samuel. Samuel did not have to

pour the holy oil upon David's head, for the oil flowed of its own accord, and the drops of oil on David's garment changed into diamonds and pearls.

6. *David in the Palace of Saul*

In those days there lived a very rich man in Israel, and he had a beautiful wife. The rich man died at an early age and the mayor of the city wished to marry the widow, but she refused. She feared the mayor and decided to leave the city for a time. She was unable to carry her fortune with her, but she was afraid to entrust it to any one. She then thought of a plan. She took honey jars, filled them partly with gold, then covered the gold with honey, deposited the jars with a neighbor, and left the city.

One day the neighbor was celebrating the marriage of his son, and he ran short of honey. He thought of the honey left in his care by the woman, and he thought: "I will borrow some of the honey, and as soon as the feast is over, I will fill the jars again." When he tried to empty one of the jars, he discovered to his great surprise that it was partly filled with gold. He tried the other jars and they too were partly filled with gold. He removed the gold from all the jars, filled them up with honey and left them in the same place.

In the course of time, the mayor of the town died. When the woman learned of his death, she

returned and demanded the jars from her neighbor. She received the jars, but discovered that the gold concealed in them was gone. She had no evidence to prove her case against the neighbor, and when she brought suit, the court dismissed her case. She appealed to the king, but he too was unable to do anything for her.

When the woman came out crying from the palace of the king, David was playing with his companions nearby. He approached the woman and said to her: "Pray tell me of all your troubles, perhaps I shall be able to do something for you." The widow told David the entire story, and David said to her: "Go to the king and tell him that there is a young boy outside who can prove your claim."

The widow returned to the king and repeated to him the words of the youthful David. The king called for him and said: "Tell me how you can prove the guilt of the thief, when there is no evidence against him."

David replied: "I believe that the thief in his great haste may have overlooked some of the gold coins, and that these may still be found at the bottom of some of the jars." David then advised that all the jars returned to the woman be broken, and sure enough two gold coins which the thief had overlooked were stuck in one of the jars. The thief trembled greatly when he was discovered, and he was ordered by the king to return to the woman

all the gold coins that had been left in his care by the woman. When the people heard of David's wisdom, they said: "Verily, the spirit of the Lord is upon David."

Now it happened that the spirit of God left Saul, and he was advised by his attendants to look for a good harpist to come and play before him so that he might be relieved from his despondence. Doeg, one of the king's officers, reminded Saul of the wonderful wisdom displayed by David at the trial of the widow, and advised the king to send for David, for in addition to his wisdom David was a master player on the harp.

David was taken to the king's palace, and whenever an evil spirit came upon Saul, David would take his harp and play before the king, and the playing always soothed Saul's troubled spirit.

7. *David Slays Goliath*

Now Orpah, the sister of Ruth, had given birth to four giants, of whom Goliath was the strongest and the greatest. He was the chief warrior in the camp of the Philistines. When the army of the Israelites went forth to meet the Philistines on the battle-field, Goliath sent a messenger to Saul, saying: "You have come out to fight against us. Why wage war? Send any one of your warriors to fight with me; if he kills me, the Philistines shall be your slaves; if I kill him, you will be the slaves of the Philistines." Saul on account of his illness

dared not encounter the giant, and none in the army of Israel would venture against Goliath.

Now Jesse, the father of David, had sent all his sons to the army of Saul, only David remaining behind to take care of the flocks. One day Jesse sent David to the battle-field to bring some provisions to his brothers. When David reached the battle-field he saw Goliath come forth from the ranks of the Philistines, and make his challenge defying the God of Israel, which Goliath was accustomed to do twice daily. David grew exceedingly angry when he heard the words of the giant, and said to those that were near him: "Who is this Philistine that dares defy our God?" When David was informed of the situation, he offered to accept the challenge.

Thereupon David was brought before Saul, and David repeated his readiness to go out and fight the giant. The king tried to discourage David, but to no avail. David insisted that with the help of the Lord whom Goliath was defying, he would be able to vanquish the Philistine.

David then put on the armor of King Saul, and to the amazement of all those present, the armor of the powerfully-built king fitted the slender youngster. Saul understood that David was destined for greatness and was jealous of him. David knew Saul's thought, and he therefore decided to discard the armor and to wear the apparel of a simple shepherd.

David went forth to meet the giant

David went forth to meet the giant, having only a shepherd's pouch and a sling with him. As he was crossing the plain a stone cried out to David: "Pick me up and take me with you." He stooped, picked up the stone and put it into his pouch. When he had advanced a few paces, another stone cried to him: "Pick me up and take me with you." David did so. And a third and a fourth and a fifth stone cried out in like manner, and was likewise taken along by David.

When Goliath perceived David, the giant cried out to him: "Who are you that you have come out to meet me?"

"I have come to fight with you," replied David.

"Go back and play with children of your own age," said the giant. "Come nearer and I will give your flesh to the cattle of the field."

"You are crazy and you are doomed," said David, "for cattle eat no flesh. I will give your flesh to the fowl of the air." As he said this, David pointed skyward.

Goliath raised his head to see if there were any birds about, and, in so doing, he pushed the visor slightly away from his forehead. David at once aimed the stone he had placed in his sling and struck the giant on the exposed spot. As Goliath fell to the ground face downward, an angel came down from heaven and said: "Let the mouth that spoke defiance against the Lord be choked with earth." David immediately pulled the sword out

of the sheath of the giant and with it he cut off the head of him who had defied God and His people.

8. *Saul's Jealousy of David*

Saul had promised his daughter to the man who should slay Goliath. He now fulfilled his promise and gave his daughter Michal to David in marriage. David proved to be a good general in his engagements against the enemies of the Israelites, and his fame spread all over the land. The more popular David became, the greater grew the jealousy of King Saul against him. Once Saul sent men to kill David in his bed. David was informed by his wife Michal of the king's intentions, and he was compelled to flee for his life in the middle of the night.

King Saul was not content, and he constantly pursued David. Once, as he was fleeing, David saw a man afflicted with madness, who was followed and jeered at by many children. David said: "The world would be beautiful and good, were it not for insanity. What use does the world derive from a lunatic, who runs hither and thither, tears his clothes, and is pursued by a mob of hooting children?"

"Verily," said God to David, "a time will come when thou wilt pray to Me to afflict thee wtih madness."

It happened that David in his flight from King Saul had to leave the land of Israel. He came to

Achish, the king of the Philistines, who lived in Gath. The three giant brothers of Goliath formed the body-guard of the king of the Philistines. They recognized David and they demanded from the king that the murderer of their brother be killed. In his distress, David prayed to God to let him appear as a madman in the eyes of King Achish and his court.

David went through the streets, tore his clothes, ran hither and thither, and wrote upon the gates of the courts that King Achish was indebted to him for the sum of one hundred myriads of golden shekels, and that the queen owed him fifty myriads of golden shekels. David was brought to the king's court followed by a mob of hooting children. Now, the wife and the daughter of the king were both afflicted with insanity. When the king looked out of the window and saw David acting like a lunatic, he exclaimed: "Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to play the madman in my presence?" Thus was David's life saved.

At another time David had said that there was no need for the spider in this world, that it was an absolutely useless creature. "All it does," said David, "is spin a web that is of no value." Now in the course of his flight from Saul, David took refuge in a cave. Saul and his men were not far from the cave and were about to enter it and seek David there. But God sent a spider to weave its

web across the opening. When Saul noticed the web stretching across the mouth of the cave, he said to his men: "It is futile to enter the cave to search for David. No one has entered this cave for some time as the spider's web across the opening is unbroken." Saul and his men then left, and thus David's life was saved by a spider.

On another occasion, David expressed his opinion that the wasp was a useless creature. Now David always wished to convince King Saul, his father-in-law, that he desired his friendship. Once while Saul and his men were lying fast asleep in their camp, David visited them. To prove to his father-in-law that he had visited his camp and that he might have harmed Saul had he wished to do so, David resolved to carry off the cruse that was standing between the feet of Saul's general Abner, who was a giant of extraordinary size. Abner was lying with his knees drawn up, but as David took the cruse and was about to leave, Abner stretched out his legs, and pinned David down as with two solid pillars. But a wasp came to David's rescue. It stung Abner so that he moved his feet in his sleep and released David.

9. *The Death of Saul*

Samuel died at the age of fifty-two, and all Israel from Dan to Beer Sheba mourned for him. There was only one person in all the land who did not take part in the mourning; Nabal, instead of

being grieved at the great loss, made a feast at his home. "What!" God exclaimed, "all Israel weeps and laments over the death of My beloved servant, Samuel, and this worthless man engages in feasting!" Three days after the week of mourning for Samuel, Nabal died.

Upon the death of Samuel, Saul became discouraged, for he was now left isolated and alone. The Philistines soon gathered their armies again to fight with the Israelites. Saul tried to inquire of God, as to the outcome of the war, but neither in his dreams, nor by the Urim and Thummim and the prophets, did he receive a reply. He then decided to get into communication with the dead prophet Samuel.

Saul disguised himself and together with his two generals Abner and Amasa he went to Abner's mother, who was the witch of En-dor. He requested her to bring up the spirit of Samuel. When she began to summon the dead prophet back to earth, Samuel thought that the day of judgment had arrived. He went to Moses and pleaded: "Pray accompany me and testify for me that I have always followed the law of God." Samuel, accompanied by Moses, answered the summons of the witch of En-dor and appeared before Saul.

The witch was terrified when she beheld the spirit of the dead prophet. "All the spirits of the dead that I have raised until now," she said, "have appeared with their heads downward and with

their feet in the air. This figure stands upright before me." She then understood that Saul was in her house, and she became greatly alarmed, for Saul had slain all the witches that had been found in the land of Israel. But when Saul assured her by taking an oath that no harm would befall her, she took courage, and informed him that she had seen the spirit of Samuel.

Then the spirit spoke to Saul: "Why didst thou enkindle the wrath of God by calling up the spirits of the dead? God has resolved to wrest the kingdom out of thy hand, and give it to David."

"While thou wast dwelling among the living," said the terrified king, "thou didst not mention to me the name of David."

"When we dwelt together," answered Samuel, "I was in a world of lies, and I feared thy wrath and thy revengeful nature. Now I abide in a world of truth, and thou hearest only words of truth from me. To-morrow thou and thy sons shall dwell together with me."

On the following day, King Saul summoned his three sons and said to them: "Come let us fight for our people." God called together the heavenly hosts and said to them: "Behold the being My hand hath created! Saul goeth to war knowing that he will lose his life, yet he taketh his sons with him, and cheerfully accepteth the punishment ordained."

Immediately, Moses appeared before God and

pleaded: "Master of all creatures, pray save the humble Saul from death. Does it really please Thee that the first king of Thy people, the chosen of God, shall be killed?"

"Do not entreat Me," answered God, "but plead with the priests of Nob who were slain by him and who now stand before me accusing him of bloodshed."

So the first king of Israel met his death as a hero and a saint.

Chapter IX

DAVID

1. *His Wars*

WHEN David ascended the throne of Israel, he desired first of all to take possession of Jerusalem. Now the Jebusites who inhabited Jerusalem were the descendants of the sons of Heth who had sold the Cave of Machpelah to Abraham. When the sale took place Heth said to Abraham: "On this condition do I sell the cave to you, that your children should never take Jerusalem, the capital city, by force." Monuments of brass were erected to bear evidence of this agreement. When therefore David approached Jerusalem, the Jebusite pointed out to him the promise of Abraham engraved upon the brass monuments, and they said to him: "If you desire to take the city, you will have to destroy the monuments first."

The city of Jerusalem was well fortified by a high wall, and the Jebusites thought it would be impossible for David to gain entrance to the city and destroy the monuments without using force. Now, Joab, the general of David's army, was a

very famous warrior and David's right-hand man. He now devised a plan to get into the city. He brought a tall cypress tree and set it up near the wall which surrounded the city. He bent the tree downward and, standing upon the head of David, he grasped the very tip of the tree. When the tree rebounded, Joab was raised high above the wall, and he jumped from the tree and alighted upon the wall. He then jumped into the city and destroyed the monuments. David wished to duplicate the feat of Joab, but in his case a miracle happened: the wall shrank in height so that he stood over it and walked into the city without difficulty. David and Joab destroyed the monuments without using force, and the city was taken by David's warriors.

When the Philistines heard that David had ascended the throne, they gathered their armies to fight against the Israelites. David went out to meet the Philistines in battle in the Valley of the Giants. God appeared to David and commanded him thus: "Thou shalt not attack the host of the Philistines until thou wilt hear the mulberry trees rustle."

The enemy advanced until there was but a short distance between them and the Israelites. The Israelitish warriors were full of hope and courage and were ready to throw themselves against the Philistines, but David restrained them, saying: "God has commanded me not to attack the enemy

before the tops of the mulberry trees begin to rustle. If we disobey His command, we shall surely die. If we delay the attack, it is probable that we shall be killed by the Philistines, but we shall at any rate die like pious men that keep God's command. Let us have confidence in God and in His words."

Scarcely had he finished speaking when the tops of the mulberry trees began to rustle. David and his men, who had waited impatiently for this signal to attack the enemy, at once hurled themselves against the Philistines and defeated them in the fierce battle that followed.

When King Saul died, the angels in heaven surrounded the throne of God and said: "Why, O Lord, hast Thou taken away the royal dignity from Saul and given it to David?"

Now God said to the heavenly host: "See the difference between Saul and David. Saul had consulted the Urim and Thummin, but when he saw the Philistines drawing nigh, he abandoned the Urim and Thummin and fled."

2. *The Heroism of Joab*

Shortly afterward Joab chose twelve thousand warriors, whom he considered to be the flower of the army of Israel, and set out to capture the capital city of the Amalekites. The city was strongly fortified, and Joab and his men besieged it for six months, but were unable to capture it.

They hurled Joab with a powerful sling over the high walls

"It would be better for us to return to our homes, to our wives and our children," the soldiers said to their general Joab. "There is no possibility of our getting into this city."

"Such a step would not only make us the object of contempt and derision in the eyes of our brothers," said Joab, "but it would also prove fatal to our people. When our enemies hear of our retreat, they will unite as one to wage war against us. Now hurl me into the city by means of a sling, and then wait forty days. If at the end of the forty days you will see blood flowing from the gates of the fortress, it will be a sign to you that I am still alive."

The soldiers were unwilling to do the bidding of their general, but Joab insisted and they hurled him with a powerful sling over the high walls that surround the city.

When Joab was cast from the sling, he fell into the garden of a widow, whose daughter found him unconscious. He soon regained his consciousness, and he thus explained his presence to the widow and her daughter: "I am an Amalekite and I was captured by the Israelites. They stripped me of my country clothes and made me put on clothes made according to their fashion. They tried to make a slave of me, but when I refused to take orders from them, they decided to inflict death upon me by throwing me over the walls of our city by means of a sling. Now I will pay you well if you will let me have garments worn by our people the

Amalekites, for I dare not walk out in the streets of the city with Israelitish clothes on me, lest I be taken for a spy."

As soon as Joab was provided with the garb of an Amalekite he went to a blacksmith to have a sword made, for his own had been broken by his fall. The smith forged a new sword for Joab, but when Joab grasped it firmly, it broke in his hand. The smith forged a second sword, and it, too, broke in the firm grasp of the general. The smith made a third attempt and this time succeeded in making a sword suitable for Joab.

As Joab tested the sword in his hand, he asked the blacksmith, "Whom would you like to slay with this sword?"

"I would like to kill Joab, the general of the Israelitish king," the smith replied.

"I am the one whom you would like to kill," said Joab, and when the smith rose in astonishment, Joab killed him instantly. As he walked through the streets, he killed five hundred Amalekites, and not one escaped to betray him. This onslaught Joab repeated at intervals of several days, and the Amalekites said to one another: "Asmodeus, the king of demons, is raging among the inhabitants of our city, and slaying them in large numbers."

The number of Amalekites slain by Joab reached into the thousands, but the Israelites were not aware of Joab's success. But when the Israel-

itish warriors were already beginning to mourn the loss of their heroic general, they noticed a stream of blood flowing from the fortress of the besieged city. The soldiers joyfully cried out: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One." Suddenly they heard a voice answer from the top of a high tower: "The Lord will not forsake His people." The soldiers raised their eyes in astonishment and saw that this response had come from their beloved general Joab.

Joab then descended from the tower, and at his command the valiant warriors captured the city of the Amalekites, and destroyed the heathen temples. The king of the Amalekites, who was wearing a crown of pure gold on his head, was taken captive and was brought before King David.

3. *The Holy Ark Removed to Jerusalem*

Among the chief councillors at the court of King David there was a learned man whose name was Ahithophel. He was a man of remarkable learning and wisdom. The king always followed the advice of Ahithophel, for the oracles rendered by the very Urim and Thummim were always in accord with the advice of this councillor.

One day David chose ninety thousand men, learned in the law of God, and appointed them as leaders among the people. Ahithophel became very angry, for the king had omitted him from the list. On that day a remarkable thing happened.

David had decided to remove the Holy Ark, which had hitherto been at Geba, to Jerusalem. At the king's command, the ark was to be placed on a wagon to be removed. But when the priests attempted to take hold of it, they were raised into the air and thrown violently to the ground. This happened several times. David in his despair turned to Ahithopel and asked: "Tell me wherewith we may be able to appease God?"

"Let the king make no inquiry of me; let him consult the ninety thousand men that he has but now installed in office," retorted Ahithophel.

"He who knows a remedy and withholds it from the sufferer shall not die a natural death, but shall be strangled," said David.

Thereupon Ahithophel said: "Even school children are acquainted with the law that the holy Ark must not be conveyed in a wagon, but that it must be carried on the shoulders of priests."

4. *A Father's Love*

Once, in a discussion with Joab, his general, David said: "As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those that fear him." Joab was astonished and thought: "Why does the king compare the love of God to the love of a father for his child, and not with the love of a mother? Mother-love is always stronger and the more self-sacrificing."

Joab made up his mind to find out whether

David's idea of the love of parents for their children was the correct one. One day, he chanced to enter the house of a poor old man who was the father of twelve children. The old man supported his children and his wife with the toil of his own hands.

The general said to the old man: "You have twelve children and you work very hard to support them. Now sell me one of them and I will give you a good price for him. You will have one child less to care for, and with the money I give you you will be able to take better care of the other children."

"Thank you for your offer," replied the good father; "but all my children are dear to me, and I cheerfully work hard to support them. I will not sell any of my children for any price."

When the father had left the house, Joab approached the mother, and said to her: "Good woman, you have twelve children to take care of. I will give you one hundred gold denarii for one of your children." The mother at first refused to accept the offer, but Joab finally persuaded her and she agreed to accept the gold denarii for one of her children. Joab paid her the money, took the child and left the old man's house.

In the evening the father returned home, and cut the bread, as was his custom, into fourteen slices, for himself, his wife and his twelve children. When he distributed the portions, he no-

ticed that one of the children was missing, for he had one portion left over.

"Now what has happened to my child?" asked the father. The mother then told him truthfully that she had sold the child to the general while the father was away. The father was greatly grieved, and would neither eat nor drink.

Early in the morning, he took the one hundred gold denarii from his wife and left the house to overtake the Israelitish army. After a long journey, the old man reached the headquarters of the king's general, and when he was allowed to enter, he said to Joab: "Here are your gold denarii, and pray return the child to me."

"The child was sold to me by your wife, the child's mother," said Joab, "and you cannot get him back."

"If you refuse to return my child to me," said the old man, "I will spill your blood in the presence of the army of our king."

The warrior smiled. He surrendered the child to his father, refused to take the money back and said: "Yes, our king was right when he compared God's love for man to a father's love for his child."

5. *The Great Depth*

David was very desirous of building the Lord's Temple, but God would not allow him to do so, because David was a man of blood. God there-

fore sent His prophet Nathan to advise David not to build the Temple.

When David heard the message that God had sent to him by Nathan, he trembled and said: "Ah, verily, God has found me unworthy to build His Sanctuary."

"Nay, the blood which thou hast shed," replied God, "I regard as the blood of sacrifices. I do not wish to have thee build the Temple, because then it would remain standing forever, and would never be destroyed."

"That would be excellent," said David.

"But I foresee that the children of Israel will sin," said God, "and as a punishment I shall destroy the Temple and thus save Israel from destruction. But thy son that shall succeed thee shall certainly build My Temple."

David was pleased when he heard that one of his sons would ascend the throne and build the Temple. David then said: "Let me start digging the foundation for the Temple which my son shall build."

While he was digging the foundation, David found a shard at a depth of one thousand five hundred cubits. He was about to lift the shard, when it exclaimed: "Thou must not do it."

"Why not?" asked the king.

"Because I rest upon the abyss."

"Since when have you been resting there?"

"When the voice of God was heard uttering the words from Sinai, 'I am the Lord thy God,' the earth quaked and sank into the abyss. God then placed me here to cover the abyss. If I am removed, the waters of the abyss will flood the earth."

David, however, disregarded the words of the shard, and lifted it. Immediately the waters of the abyss began to rise and threatened to flood the earth. Ahithophel, the youthful counsellor of David, was standing near the excavations. He thought to himself as he saw the waters rising higher and higher: "Now David will perish and I shall be king over Israel."

The king in his desperate straits exclaimed: "Whoever knows how to restore the shard to its place, and fails to do so, will die a horrible death!"

Ahithophel thereupon took a piece of clay, inscribed upon it the Name of God, and threw it into the abyss. The waters subsided at once, but they sank so low that David was afraid that the earth would lose its moisture. The waters sank to a depth of fifteen thousand cubits, but David sang the fifteen "Songs of Ascents," and the waters were lifted fifteen thousand cubits to their normal level.

6. *David's Sin*

David was successful in all the wars he waged against his enemies, and in everything he undertook. He was beloved of all the people of Israel,

and his fame spread all over the earth. But with all this he was pious and humble. He devoted his spare time to the study of the Law, and to singing songs of praise to God.

David was a man of little sleep. Every evening before bedtime, he hung his harp at the head of his bed. Now the strings of the harp were made out of the gut of the ram that had been sacrificed by Abraham on Mount Moriah. This wonderful instrument was so placed each evening that its face was turned toward the north. When the cool night air stirred in the room, it agitated the strings of the harp. The musical instrument gave out such sweet notes, that David was aroused from his sleep at midnight. Then he would occupy himself with the study of the Law and with singing Psalms of praise to God.

One day David complained to God, saying: "O Lord of the world, why do people say 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob,' and never 'the God of David?' "

"Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were tried and proven by Me," came the reply of God, "but thou hast not been tried."

"Then, O Lord, examine me, try me," David entreated.

God said: "I will put thee to the proof, and I will even grant thee what I did not grant Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. To them I did not say beforehand that I was about to try them, but I tell

thee that I am going to test thee and therefore take care."

Once Satan disguised himself and appeared to David in the shape of a little bird. The king shot an arrow at the bird, but the bird escaped and stood on the top of a wicker screen. David shot again at the bird, but instead he hit the screen which toppled over. Behind the screen David beheld the beautiful Bath-sheba combing her hair. When David returned to his palace, he immediately sent for Bath-sheba and compelled her to become his wife.

David soon realized that he had transgressed against God, and he repented. God afflicted David with leprosy, and all his friends were compelled to leave him for a period of six months. Even the spirit of God departed from him. For many years, David wept and prayed to God that his sin be forgiven, but God inflicted many punishments upon David for his crime. The severest penalty of all was the rebellion of his own son Absalom.

7. *Rebellion of Absalom*

Absalom, son of King David, was a man of gigantic stature, of rare beauty, and of great amiability. But one day Absalom decided to start a rebellion against his own father. He appeared before his royal father and said to him: "I am going to Hebron to fulfill a vow I made while in

exile. Pray give me a letter permitting me to choose two elders from each and every town to accompany me on the way."

David gave Absalom the letter he requested, and the rebellious son selected on the way two hundred of the most prominent chiefs of the courts, and they followed him to Hebron. He then ordered, upon the advice of Ahithopel who had joined him, that the entire assembly should, upon hearing the sound of a trumpet, shout, "Absalom reigns!"

When David was informed of Absalom's rebellion, he urged all his friends to flee from Jerusalem. In the course of his flight, the king thus sang to God: "Thy righteousness is like the mountains of God, Thy judgments are a great deep."

"The king is forced to flee from his rebellious son, and yet he calls it 'righteousness,'" said the wondering attendants.

"Am I not in better circumstances than our father Jacob who had to flee from his brother? And is not my condition better than that of Moses who had to flee from the wrath of Pharaoh?" answered the king. "They were alone and accompanied by no one, but to me God is kind; I see friends and faithful bodyguards around me. Furthermore, the rebel may take pity on me, for he is my own son."

When the fleeing king and his attendants reached the Mount of Olives, the king commanded his men to bring him an idol. His men went to search for

an idol when they were met by Hushai the Archite, one of David's best friends. The king's men explained to Hushai what they had been sent for. Hushai immediately went to David and said to him: "The people will wonder that such a king should worship idols."

"In time to come," replied David, "people will wonder and say: 'Should a king such as David be punished and killed by his own son?' They will then desecrate the Name of God and say: 'It is vain to serve God and worship Him, for even a most pious man like King David receives no mercy from the hand of God.' I therefore wished to serve an idol in the presence of my people, so that the people in time to come will say that I was justly punished by God with death at the hands of my own son."

The rebellion of Absalom came to a fearful end. Ahitophel, the chief adviser of Absalom, ended his days by hanging himself, because his advice as to how the attack should be made on David was not accepted by Absalom. During a battle with David's troops, Absalom's long locks of hair were caught in an oak-tree while he rode through a forest. He was about to cut his hair with the sword in his hand, but suddenly he saw hell open beneath him, and he said to himself: "Better to remain hanging in the tree than to throw myself alive into this fearful inferno."

At this moment God said: "Because Absalom stole the hearts of his father, of the people and of the chief judges, three darts shall rend his heart." And so it was. Joab saw the rebel Absalom hanging by his hair in the oak-tree, and he shot three darts into the heart of Absalom.

8. *Another Rebellion Quashed*

A certain base fellow, whose name was Sheba, the son of Bichri, from the tribe of Benjamin, instigated a rebellion, gained a large following and proclaimed: "We have nothing to do with David; every man to his tent." Thereupon many men of Israel deserted King David, and followed Sheba the son of Bichri.

Joab, at the command of King David, pursued Sheba and his men. Sheba took refuge in Abel, a fortified city, and Joab and his men laid siege to the city. Joab's men threw up a mound and from it kept on battering the walls of the city.

Now in that city, there lived a woman, Serah by name, who was the daughter of Asher, Jacob's son. She had been blessed by Jacob with long life for it was she who had informed him that Joseph was alive in Egypt. Serah ascended the wall of Abel and exclaimed: "Pray tell the king's general that a woman would like to speak to him."

When Joab approached the gates of the city, she said to him: "Are you Joab, who has a seat in

the Highest Court of the land? Why then do you violate the law of God who commanded that when you draw nigh to a city to fight against it, you must first make peace overtures to it?"

"Pray tell me who are you?" asked the general.

"I am Serah the daughter of Asher, the son of Jacob," answered the woman.

"It is not my intention to destroy a city of Israel," said Joab; "I wish only to get the rebel Sheba who is seeking safety behind the walls of this town. Deliver him into my hands and I will raise the siege."

"His head shall be thrown down to you from the top of this wall," Serah assured him.

Serah called together the elders of the city and said to them: "The king's general and his men desire to destroy our city and slay us all."

"What does he demand of us, and how can we appease him that he may not destroy us?" asked the frightened inhabitants of Abel.

"He demands that we deliver into his hands one thousand men to be slain," answered the woman. "But I will go to him again and ask him to reduce the number to five hundred."

After a short absence, she returned to the people and told them that Joab would be satisfied with five hundred men, and the people said: "Well, we will cast lots among us and choose the five hundred victims."

"I will go again to the general," said Serah,

"perhaps he will be willing to reduce the number again."

Serah then came with the glad news that Joab was willing to accept only one man, Sheba the son of Bichri. The people of Abel killed Sheba and threw his head down to Joab. Thereupon the general ordered every fighting man to return to his home.

9. *David Kills Goliath's Brother*

God said to David one day: "On account of thee the priestly city of Nob was destroyed by Saul, and on thy account Saul and his three sons were slain in the battle with the Philistines. How much longer shall this sin remain unatoned? Now, what wouldst thou prefer—that thy children should perish, or that thou thyself shouldst be delivered into the hands of thine enemies?"

"Let me fall into the hands of my enemies," answered David.

One day, David was hunting in the wilderness. Then came Satan in the form of a stag, and David shot an arrow at the deer, but could not kill it. He followed it and it ran before him into the land of the Philistines. There David was recognized by Ishbi-benob the giant, a brother of Goliath. The giant said: "David has slain my brother, now he is in my power!"

Ishbi-benob seized David, chained him, cast him down, and laid a wine-press upon him that he

might crush him and squeeze all the blood out of him. But God softened the earth beneath David, so that he remained there uninjured.

At that time Abishai, a general of David and a brother of Joab, was getting ready to welcome the Sabbath, for the misfortune to the king happened on a Friday. Abishai filled a basin with water to wash his hands therein, when he suddenly noticed drops of blood in the water. Then he was startled by a dove that came to him, plucking out her plumes, moaning, and wailing. The dove had seen the plight of the king, and had come to Jerusalem in grief.

Abishai understood that the king was in danger. He went to look for him in the palace, in the house of study, but the king was nowhere to be found. Abishai then sought the wise men, learned in the Law, and said to them: "The king of Israel is in danger, and the only means of reaching him with speed is to mount the royal mule which is as swift as the wind, but the law forbids any one to ride the king's mounts."

"In an emergency all things are lawful," decided the learned men.

Abishai at once mounted the mule of King David, and rode into the desert. The earth contracted under the feet of the mule, and Abishai reached the house of Ishbi-benob in the twinkling of an eye.

Orpah, the mother of the giant, sat outside the

door spinning. When she saw Abishai galloping up, she broke her thread and flung the spindle at him, with the intention of striking him dead. But the spindle fell short. Orpah cried to Abishai: "Give me my spindle, boy." Abishai stopped, picked up the spindle and cast it at Orpah with all his might. The spindle struck her on the brow, and she fell back and died.

Ishbi-benob learned what had happened to his mother, and he said to himself: "These two men will be too much for me!" He raised the wine-press and, to his amazement, he found David alive. He drew David out from under the wine-press, flung him high into the air and set his lance in the ground, that David might fall upon it, and be transfixed. But at that moment Abishai rode up and he called out the Name of God. David remained suspended in the air. Abishai again pronounced the Name of God, and David was gradually let down, landing some distance from the lance.

David and Abishai thereupon ran away, hotly pursued by the giant, but when they had fled some distance, David said to Abishai: "Let us turn and face the giant, perhaps we shall be able to overcome him." The giant hurled his shield at David to kill him, but David jumped backward eighteen cubits and thus he escaped death. Then David and Abishai slew Ishbi-benob, the fourth giant-son of Orpah.

10. *Solomon's Wise Decision*

When Solomon was still a lad, there lived a very rich man, who once sent his son on a long business trip to Africa.

After many years the son returned and found that his father had died in the meantime, and that his treasures had passed into the hands of one of the slaves. This slave had so badly treated the widow and the daughter of the rich man that they had fled from their own home to seek peace in some unknown place.

The son entered his father's house and said to the slave: "I am the son of your dead master, and now I demand that you turn over my father's property to me." The slave laughed and said: "You are an impostor. I am the son of the dead man, and all that you see belongs to me."

The slave thereupon called together his servants and ordered them to drive the young man out of the house.

The son appeared before King David and told him of all that had happened, and the king asked: "Do you have any witnesses to prove your case?"

"I have no witnesses," said the son, "for all the servants of my father's house who remember me fear the wrath of the slave and would not testify in my favor."

"I am sorry I am unable to do anything for you," said the king, "since you have no witnesses

to prove your claim, and the other has many people to testify for him."

The son, sorely disappointed, left the palace to look for some help. Thereupon the youthful Solomon, who had overheard the man's story, said to David: "Father, will you permit me to try this case for you?"

"Yes, my son, you have my permission," said David.

Solomon at once ordered that the slave and the son of the dead man appear before the king again, and when they came up he said to them: "Now each one of you claims to be the real son of the rich man. Go to the grave where the rich man is buried, break it open, take one of the dead man's bones, break it and bring it to me."

As the two men left the palace, Solomon ordered three of the court attendants to follow the two men secretly, watch their movements and report to him. And this is what the attendants reported to the youthful Solomon: "We followed the two men closely, and when they reached the grave, one of them said to the other, 'You shameless slave! does it not suffice you that you have robbed my father of his property, but you must also insult his remains and rob his grave?' The other man heaped insults and curses upon the first, opened the grave, took out a bone from the dead man's body and broke it."

When the two men appeared before Solomon,

he said to the son: "Where is the broken bone that I have commanded you to bring to me?"

"Even if I were to lose my entire possessions," said the son, "I would not dare insult my beloved father by opening his grave, taking one of his bones, and breaking it."

"As for me," said the crafty slave, "I have obeyed your order, and here is one of my father's bones."

"Now we can easily decide who the true son is," said Solomon. "Let the rightful son take possession of his father's property, and let this crafty slave receive his punishment."

The rightful heir took possession of his father's property to the great rejoicing of the household. He called for the crafty slave and said to him: "I will pardon you for all the evil you have done, if you will but find my mother and my sister and bring them back to me."

The slave went to look for the two women, and after some time he found them living in poverty in a distant town. He informed them of the return of the rightful heir, and he brought them back to their home. The son not only pardoned the slave and set him free, but he also provided him with money and food and sent him to live in a far-off town.

11. *The Death of David*

One day David said to God: "O Lord, tell me the number of years that I am destined to live."

"Thy petition cannot be granted," said God, "for I have ordained that no man shall know his end."

"Then tell me, O Lord," pleaded David, "the day of the week when I shall die."

"Thou shalt die on the Sabbath," God informed him.

"O merciful God," pleaded David again, "may I be permitted to die on a Friday."

"Thy wish cannot be granted," responded God; "for one day passed by thee in the study of the Torah and in the singing of Psalms is more delightful to Me than a thousand offerings that may be made by thy son Solomon."

"O God, permit me then to die on a Sunday," said David.

"This too must be denied thee," said God, "for on the Sunday after thy death thy son will ascend the throne, and thou canst not live even one moment while thy son is king."

Now the Angel of Death has no power to take the life of a man when he is engaged in the fulfilment of God's commandments. David, therefore, from the time he had held his conversation with God, was in the habit of occupying himself exclusively with the study of the Torah every Sabbath, to escape the Angel of Death.

When the Sabbath came for David to pass away, the Angel of Death entered the palace and found David engaged in the study of the Torah. He

waited and waited, but David would not cease studying even for a single moment. The Angel of Death had to resort to cunning to gain possession of David's soul. He went into the garden and caused a violent rustling among the trees. The king arose and walked over to the stairway leading from his palace to the garden. He intended to descend the stairway in order to discover the cause of the noise, but as soon as he placed his foot on the topmost step, the entire stairway tumbled down and King David was killed.

Chapter X

SOLOMON'S WISDOM

1. *Solomon Accepts Wisdom from God*

HEN Solomon ascended the throne of his father David, he was very young. One night, God appeared to him in a dream and said to him: "Choose whatever thou pleasest and it shall be granted thee."

"O Lord," replied the youthful king, "I care not for wealth, nor for glory, nor for conquest. All I wish is that Thou open for me the Gates of Wisdom."

God granted Solomon's request and He opened for him the forty-nine Gates of Wisdom. The first proof of his wisdom, while he was king, came in the decision of a case that had been brought before him. God desired that the wisdom of Solomon be made known the world over, and He sent two spirits in the form of two women who appeared before Solomon for trial. They brought with them a babe, and each one claimed that the babe belonged to her.

Solomon said: "Take a sword and cut the babe into two equal parts, and give one-half to one of the women and the other half to the other."

"Woe to thee, O land, when thy king is a boy!" exclaimed the councillors of the young king.

"Kill it," said one woman; "it shall be neither mine nor hers."

The real mother said to the king: "Pray give the child to this woman, but do not kill it."

"Give it to the second woman," ordered Solomon, "for she is the real mother of the child."

When the councillors realized the wisdom of the king, they all proclaimed: "Happy art thou, O land, when thy king is a free man!"

After that, the fame of Solomon's wisdom spread far and wide.

Solomon understood the language of the beasts and the birds, and he was ruler over them. Even the animals came to Solomon to have him decide their disputes.

2. *The Man and the Serpent*

Once a man was walking alone through a field. In his hand he carried a jug of milk. On the way he met a serpent who was weeping and wailing pitifully.

"What ails you?" asked the man of the serpent.

"I am tortured by thirst," answered the serpent, "and I am on the point of death. Pray, what have you in that jug?"

"I am carrying milk in this jug," answered the man.

"Pray give me some of the milk to drink,"

"Give the child to the second woman, she is the real mother"

begged the serpent, "and as a reward for your kindness I will show you a hidden treasure."

The man consented and gave the milk to the serpent. After the serpent finished drinking, he led the man to a great rock and said: "Under this rock lies the treasure." The man rolled the rock aside and as he was about to take the treasure, the serpent suddenly made a lunge at him, and coiled itself around his neck.

"What do you mean by this?" exclaimed the terrified man.

"I am going to kill you," replied the serpent, "because you attempted to rob me of all my money."

"Let us go to King Solomon," proposed the man, "and he will tell us which of us is in the right."

The serpent agreed to the man's proposal, and the man, with the serpent still wrapped around his neck, went to the king. The king heard the claims made by the man, and he said to the serpent: "Why do you wish to kill the man? You promised to give him the treasure."

"I desire to kill the man," answered the serpent, "because it was God's command to the serpent, 'Thou shalt bruise the heel of man.' "

"Before I render my decision," said Solomon to the serpent, "you must release your hold upon the man's neck and descend; in court neither party to a lawsuit must have an unfair advantage."

The serpent obeyed the king's command, and he glided down to the floor. Solomon then said to the serpent: "So you desire to kill the man because God said to the serpent: 'Thou shalt bruise the heel of man?' "

"Yes," replied the serpent firmly.

"And God's command to you," said the king turning to the man, "was to bruise the head of the serpent. Now, obey His command." And the man crushed the serpent's head.

3. *The Man with Two Heads*

Asmodeus, the king of the demons, once said to Solomon: "You are the wisest of men, yet I will show you something that you have never seen." Asmodeus then stretched forth his hand and fetched a man who had two heads and four eyes. The king became alarmed. He called for his chief adviser, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and showed him this wonderful creature.

"Please tell me who you are?" said the king to the double-headed man.

"I am one of the Cainites," answered the strange creature.

"Do the sun and the moon shine upon your land, as they do upon ours?" questioned Solomon.

"They do shine in our land," the man replied.

"Does the sun in your land rise in the east and set in the west as it does in ours?" asked Solomor further.

"No," said the Cainite. "In our land, the sun rises in the west and sets in the east."

The Cainite then expressed his desire to return to his land. Solomon asked Asmodeus to take the man back, but the king of the demons replied that he was unable to do so. So the double-headed man remained in the land of the Israelites and took for himself a wife who bore him seven sons. Six of these children resembled the mother, while one of them resembled the father, having likewise a double head and four eyes.

After some time the Cainite died, and a dispute arose among his sons as to the division of their father's property. The double-headed son claimed two portions, "Because," he said, "we are two persons and not one."

The case was brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest court of the land, but the court did not know how to decide it. The Sanhedrin brought the case before King Solomon, and, after praying to God to grant him wisdom, he said: "Fetch me a jug of boiling water, and I will determine for you whether this creature is one or two persons."

When the boiling water was brought before King Solomon, he began to pour it slowly upon one of the heads of the monster. Whereupon both mouths cried out at one and the same time: "We are dying, we are dying!"

"Now give this double-headed man but one share of the inheritance," ordered the king. The

Sanhedrin and all the attendants of the king marveled at the great wisdom of their king.

4. *The Thief Discovered*

One day three men were traveling together, and when Sabbath approached they halted and prepared to rest. As no money is allowed to be carried on one's person on the Sabbath, the men found a safe hiding place for their money. They trusted one another, and all three travelers hid their money in the same spot. When the Sabbath was over, they hastened to the spot, and discovered that the money had been stolen. It was clear that one of the three was the thief, for there was no other man about who knew of the hiding place; but which one had taken the money?

They appeared before King Solomon for trial. He said to them: "I know that you are men experienced in the ways of the world. I would like you to help me decide a very difficult case which was submitted to me by one of my vassal kings. This is the story:

"In one of the king's provinces, there lived a maiden and a youth. One day, the maiden and the young man promised one another under oath not to marry without obtaining first the other's permission. In the course of time, the young people were separated and the girl betrothed to a man whom she loved, but she refused to marry him until the companion of her youth gave his consent.

"She then took much gold and silver and together with her betrothed she set out to find the friend of her youth. After a long search she found him, and offered him a great sum of money if he would give his consent to her marriage to the man whom she now introduced to him.

" 'You can keep the gold and silver for yourself,' said the friend of her childhood, 'and I give you my best wishes and congratulations.' Now this young man loved the friend of his youth very much, but he sacrificed his own feelings for the sake of her happiness.

"The happy young couple thanked their friend heartily and started on the way home. On the road, they were surprised by an old highwayman, who was about to rob the young man of his money and of his bride. The girl told the highwayman the story of her life, and pleaded with him: 'If the friend of my youth has sacrificed his great love for me for the sake of my happiness, how much more should you, an old man, give up your evil intent, and let me go my way?' Her words touched the heart of the aged brigand, and he touched neither the girl nor the money.

"Now," continued Solomon, "the king wishes me to decide which of the three persons acted most nobly, the girl, the youth, or the highwayman, and I should like to hear your views on the question."

The three men were so elated by the honor bestowed upon them by the king that they forgot

their own dispute, and one of them said: "I admire the girl who kept her oath so faithfully."

The second one said: "The youth acted most nobly; for the sake of making happy the girl he loved, he sacrificed himself and allowed her to wed another."

"As for me, I give all the credit to the highwayman," said the third man. "He had the opportunity of taking both the girl and the money, but not only did he surrender the woman, but he also refrained from taking the money."

"This man admires the brigand," thought Solomon; "he praises the highwayman who abstained from taking the money. This proves that he himself is greedy for money." The king then cross-examined the man, who finally admitted that he had stolen the money, and pointed out the spot where he had hidden it.

5. *Wisdom Is Better than Wealth*

Three brothers once came to King Solomon and said: "Pray permit us to enter your service that we may profit by your wisdom." The king accepted the offer of their services and assigned them certain duties to perform. After thirteen years in the king's employ, the brothers said to one another: "We have left our families in the hope of learning something from the king, but we have gained nothing by our stay here."

The three brothers then appeared before the

king and asked for his permission to return to their homes. The king granted their request, and said to them: "Now each of you may have one hundred gold coins for your services, or, if you prefer, you may receive instead of the gold three maxims of sound advice from me."

They decided to take the money and set out for home. They had not gone very far from Jerusalem, when the youngest of the three said: "We have certainly acted unwisely in preferring gold to wisdom. Let us go back to the king, return the gold, and receive words of wisdom instead."

"We will not go back to the king," said the two elder brothers; "we need the money for our wives and children."

"Then you may go on," said the youngest brother, "but as for myself, I will return to the king."

The youngest of the three then hastened back to Solomon and said: "My lord, I took service under you to gain wisdom, and not to make money. Pray, take back the money, and teach me wisdom instead."

"Hearken now to these three rules of conduct," said the king to the youngest brother. "When you travel, set out on your journey at dawn, and turn in for the night when the sun sets. Never cross a river that the floods have swollen, and never confide a secret to a woman."

The man left the palace and quickly overtook

his brothers. They asked him about the wisdom he had acquired from the king, but he would tell them nothing. They journeyed on together. In the late afternoon, when the sun was about to set, they reached a spot suitable for spending the night. The youngest brother, mindful of the advice of the king, proposed to his brothers that they stop there.

"You talk nonsense," said the brothers. "We can make a good many miles before nightfall. Why stop here?"

"But you cannot tell whether you will find another place as good as this one to spend the night in," said the youngest brother.

The brothers laughed at him and at his wisdom and proceeded on their way, but the youngest brother stopped there and made arrangements to spend the night. When darkness came on, it grew very cold, but the youngest brother was warm and comfortable. His elder brothers were overtaken by a severe storm, in which they perished.

On the following day, the only surviving brother continued on his journey, and on the road he found the bodies of his dead brothers. He wept for them, then he dug graves at the roadside and buried them. He then took the gold coins which they had received from the king and proceeded on his way.

After that he reached a river which had become swollen as a result of the heavy storm. He remembered Solomon's advice and waited for the water

to subside. As he stood at the bank of the river, he observed that some of the king's servants were about to wade through the river. They were driving their beasts all laden with gold into the stream, when Solomon's pupil urged them to delay their crossing. In spite of the warning, the king's men attempted to ford the stream, were carried away by the flood and were drowned. After the water had abated, the remaining brother crossed the river, took the gold that was strapped on the drowned animals and proceeded on his way.

He reached home safely and displayed his wealth to his wife. She inquired of him where he had obtained so much gold, but he told her nothing of the experiences he had had. His wife did not desist, but wept and cried until her husband finally decided to confide his secrets to her. He told her how his brothers had met with their death on the road, and how he had taken the gold from the king's servants.

One day, during a quarrel with her husband, the woman ran out into the street and exclaimed: "Is it not enough that you have killed your two brothers, but you wish to kill me too?" His two sisters-in-law thereupon brought charges before the king against their brother-in-law for having murdered their husbands.

The man was tried, was found guilty of murder, and was ordered by the king to be executed for his crime.

"O my lord," wept the condemned man, "permit me to say a few words." And upon obtaining the king's permission, he said: "Once my two brothers and I served my lord for thirteen years, and when we left the royal palace, my brothers took gold as their reward, but I took three rules of conduct from my lord." The king said that he remembered the incident and requested that the condemned man tell him all that had occurred. The man related all that had happened, and the king said: "This man is not guilty; he made his wealth in a lawful manner." And then the king added: "Acquire wisdom; it is better than gold."

6. *The Advice of the Cock*

Once as King Solomon was going through his stables and barns, he heard the buck make a very funny remark to the ass, and when he left the stable he burst out in great laughter. The queen, daughter of the king of Egypt, happened to notice Solomon leaving the stable, and she said to him: "Pray tell me what made you laugh."

Now there is great danger connected with the knowledge of the language of animals and birds. If the one who understands their language should ever tell anybody one word that he hears from an animal, he would surely die. Solomon therefore would not tell the queen what he had heard the buck say. "It is only a trifle," the king said to the queen, "and it is not worth repeating." But the

queen insisted that she be told the trifle, and the more Solomon refused to disclose it, the more insistent she became. She even refused to come and have her regular meals at the table of the king, saying that she felt very sick at heart and that she was disappointed because the king refused to tell her the secret.

The king said to her: "I refuse to tell you the conversation of the animals, because it means the end of my days if I do tell it to you."

"You are not telling me the truth," answered the weeping queen. "You must tell me the secret; if you do not I shall surely die."

"If that is the case," said the king, "I shall tell you all about it. It is a long story and you must listen carefully.

"Once upon a time there lived a certain honest man in a large city on the sea coast. Before the man died he called for his only son and said to him: 'My son, I am going to die, and there is one request that I would like to make of you. After I die, I want you to go to the sea-shore every day and cast a loaf of bread into the sea.'

"Out of respect for his dying father, the son did not ask for the reason of this unusual request. And immediately after his father's death, he went day after day to the sea-shore and cast a large loaf of bread into the water.

"One of the small fishes of the sea was in the habit of coming to the place where the loaf of

bread would each day be thrown. The little fish would eat, at first, only a small part of the bread, then as it grew bigger and bigger, it ate more and more, until at last it was able to eat the whole loaf. And after that, even the whole loaf of bread was not sufficient for the fish, and it would swallow many small and even big fishes to satisfy its hunger.

"Leviathan, king of all sea-creatures, sent for two large whales and said to them: 'There is one naughty fish in my domains who dares swallow fishes that are weaker than himself. Go forth and bring that culprit before me.'

"The two whales brought the fish before Leviathan, who said to the prisoner: 'How dare you swallow your weak little brothers?'

" 'It is not my fault,' said the prisoner, 'but it is the fault of a certain man who daily throws a loaf of bread into the sea. I used to eat that loaf of bread every day until I grew very big and strong, and my appetite grew with me, until that little loaf of bread was no longer sufficient to satisfy my hunger. Therefore I was forced to swallow my weaker brothers to satisfy my terrible appetite.'

"The king of the fishes said: 'You are right; it is the fault of the man. Go therefore to the spot where the man comes daily, swallow him alive and bring him to me, so that we may hear what he has to say about himself.'

"Then the man was swallowed by the big fish

and when he was brought before Leviathan, the king of the fishes said: 'How dared you throw bread into the sea and make this fish so large that he requires many fishes to satisfy his ravenous appetite?'

" 'God is my witness that I have not done this with the intention of increasing the appetite of this fish,' said the terrified man. 'I have simply carried out the wish of my dying father, who had told me to throw a loaf of bread into the water, without giving any reason for his request.'

"Leviathan then said: 'I see that your intentions were not bad, and because I put you to trouble in bringing you here into the depths of the seas, I will teach you the language of animals and birds. But remember that there is great danger connected with this knowledge. If you ever tell others one word of what you hear from an animal, you will surely die.'

"The king of the fishes taught the man the language of fishes, animals and birds, and then he ordered the big fish to take the man back to the place from which he had been brought.

"After the man returned safely home, he overheard a conversation between his oxen and his bucks. The bucks asked the oxen: 'How fare you with these so-called people?'

" 'We pass our days and nights in painful toil,' replied the oxen.

"'We can give you relief, brothers,' said the bucks. 'If you take our advice, you will live in comfort, and rid yourselves of all hard work.'

"'O brothers,' exclaimed the oxen, 'pray, have pity on us and help us out. We promise to follow your advice.'

"'God knows that we speak nothing but the truth,' said the bucks. 'Our advice to you is to eat neither straw nor fodder this night. In the morning, when our master notices that your food was untouched, he will suppose that you are sick. He will not give you any work for the day, and you will have a good rest.'

"The oxen followed the advice of the bucks, and tasted none of the food that was thrown to them. The master suspected that the bucks were playing a trick upon the oxen. He arose in the middle of the night, went to the stable, and watched the bucks eat their fill from the manger of the oxen.

"Upon returning home, the master laughed loudly. His wife, amazed at the sudden outburst of laughter, said: 'What may be the cause of your laughing?'

"'Oh, just nothing,' said the husband; 'something silly has just occurred to me.'

"The master decided to punish the bucks for the trick they had played on the oxen. He ordered his servant to let the oxen rest for the day, and make the bucks do the work of the oxen.

"In the evening the bucks walked into the stable

tired and exhausted. The oxen greeted them and said: 'What is the matter, brothers?'

"'Why,' said the bucks, 'have you not heard what our heartless master has decided about you?'

"'No,' responded the frightened oxen.

"'We heard our master say that if you refuse to eat this night too, he would have you slaughtered,' said the bucks. 'He wishes to make sure of your flesh at least.'

"The oxen immediately threw themselves upon the food before them, and left not a speck behind. The master burst out in loud laughter. His wife insisted on knowing the cause of it. She swore that she would not live with him any more if he refused to tell her why he laughed. The man loved his wife and he decided to give up his life to satisfy her curiosity. Before taking leave of this world he wished to see his friends and relatives once more, and he invited them all into his house.

"In the meantime, all the domestic animals became aware of their master's approaching end. The faithful dog took it very much to heart and he touched neither food nor drink that day. The cock, on the other hand, was as gay as usual, and he and his wives ate up the dog's food. The master overheard the following conversation between the dog and the cock:

"'How ungrateful you are!' said the dog angrily. 'Our master is but a step away from the grave, and you eat and make merry.'

" 'Is it my fault that our master is a fool and an idiot?' replied the cock. 'I have ten wives, and I rule them as I will. Not one of them dares oppose me and my commands. Our master has but a single wife, and yet he cannot control and manage her.'

" 'What ought our master to do?' inquired the dog.

" 'Let him show his wife that he has some backbone,' said the cock, 'and I assure you she will not plague him any more to reveal his secret.'

"The cock's advice seemed good to the husband. He went to his wife and said to her: 'If you insist that I disclose my secret to you, great evil will befall you, and you will regret your insistence for you will be severely punished.'

"Thus did the man escape death by following the cock's advice."

The queen was ashamed when she heard this story, and asked King Solomon to pardon her for insisting that he tell her the secret.

7. *Not One Woman Out of a Thousand*

One day King Solomon uttered a wise saying in the presence of the learned Sanhedrin: "One faithful man among a thousand have I found; but a faithful woman among all these have I not found." The learned men were astonished at the statement made by the king, and Solomon said that he would prove to them that his statement was true. He

ordered some of his attendants to seek out a married couple who had the best reputation for faithfulness and virtue.

The attendants, after some time, came back with the report that they had found a married couple who enjoyed the best reputation, and that they loved one another with all their heart and soul. The king immediately ordered that the man be brought before him.

"Now," said Solomon to the husband when he was brought before him, "I was told that you are wise, learned and virtuous, and I therefore desire to appoint you to the exalted office of chief overseer of my palace, and to give you my daughter as a wife. But there is only one condition attached to my offer," added the king. "You must murder your wife to-night, so that you may be free to marry my daughter."

That evening the husband tasted neither food nor drink, for he was full of pity for his wife and little children. His wife asked him why he abstained from eating, but he gave some evasive reply. "I cannot kill my good wife when she is awake," thought the man. "In the nighttime, when she is fast asleep, I will do the king's wish, and become the king's son-in-law."

At night, when the woman was fast asleep, the husband approached her bed with drawn sword. But when he glanced at the simple loving face of his wife and saw one of his children enfolded in

the mother's arms, his affection for his wife overcame him. He drew back, replaced his sword in its sheath, saying to himself: "No, it cannot be; I cannot murder my good wife; I care not for glory and wealth; let her remain a mother to her innocent children."

In the morning, the husband was brought before King Solomon, who asked: "And where is the head of your wife that you promised to bring this morning?"

"O my lord," exclaimed the husband, "all the wealth and glory you possess, could not make me take the life of my good wife, who is the mother of my children."

Thereupon the husband was dismissed from the presence of the king and was ordered not to tell his wife one word of what had occurred.

After some time had elapsed, King Solomon called for the wife to appear before him, and said to her: "My dear woman, my love for you is very great. It is my wish to take you as my wife, and you shall be the first queen in my harem. There is one condition attached to this. You must murder your husband this evening and bring me his head in the morning."

The king thereupon gave her a thin leaden sword that could do no harm, and said to the woman: "With this sword you shall cut off your husband's head to-night."

The woman assured the king that she would

"No, it cannot be; I cannot murder my good wife!"

bring her husband's head the next morning, and she went home with the sword determined to carry out her promise.

At night, when her husband was fast asleep, the wife approached his bed, drew forth the leaden sword and struck her husband's neck with all her might. The leaden implement did no harm, but merely awakened her husband. He arose in astonishment, and saw his wife standing over him with a thin sword bent in two. Angrily he exclaimed: "Who gave you this sword, and why do you desire to kill me?" The woman then confessed her evil intent and told her husband what had passed between her and the king.

The next day both the man and his wife were brought before the king, who sat at the head of the Sanhedrin. Solomon ordered the husband to tell what had happened between him and his wife, and then the king commanded him to tell what had happened some time ago when the king had asked him to kill his own wife. When the learned men heard the story told by the husband, they all said: "Whatever our lord says, springs from profound wisdom."

Chapter XI

THE TEMPLE OF SOLOMON

1. *Asmodeus in Chains*

HEN Solomon decided to build the Temple, he called together the wise men of the land, and said to them: "You well know that God forbids the use of iron tools in erecting an altar. Advise me, therefore, you learned men of Israel, how can I build the Temple without using iron tools."

The learned men replied: "On the sixth day of the creation of the world, toward twilight, the Lord our God created the shamir, the stone that splits rocks. The shamir was used by Moses to engrave the names of the tribes on the precious stones of the ephod worn by the high priest. But it has since been hidden, and no human being knows where it can be found. Now since our lord has power over all the demons, let our lord call them together and order them to give us information as to the whereabouts of the shamir."

King Solomon at once called together all the demons and he said to them: "I have been told that

you know where the shamir can be found. Now disclose this secret to me, lest, at a word from me, you all be destroyed."

"We do not possess that information," said the terrified host of demons. "We have no knowledge of the location of the shamir. But Asmodeus, our former king, may know its whereabouts."

"Where can Asmodeus be found?" asked the king.

"Asmodeus dwells in the Mountains of Darkness. He has dug a well there upon which he has placed a huge rock and which he has sealed with his own signet. Every day he goes up to heaven to take part in the discussions at the heavenly academy. Then he descends again to earth to be present at the debates at the earthly houses of learning. After that, he returns to his dwelling in the Mountains of Darkness. He examines the seal on the well, and if he finds that the seal has not been tampered with, he rolls off the huge rock and drinks of the water."

King Solomon took a chain, a gold ring upon which was engraved the name of God, a bundle of wool, and a jug of wine. He called for his most trusted man, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and said to him: "Take the chain, ring, wool, and wine and go to the Mountains of Darkness where Asmodeus dwells and bring him to me in fetters."

Arrived at the Mountains of Darkness, Benaiah discovered the well and bored a hole into it from

below so that all the water was drained out. He then stopped up the hole with wool, and bored another hole near the top of the well through which he filled the well with wine. He stopped up this hole too with wool, and then climbed a tall tree to see what would happen.

After a time Asmodeus came to the well, examined the seal, and finding it untouched, he rolled off the huge stone and bent down to drink. But to his astonishment he found wine instead of water, and he said: "My enemy, King Solomon, who deposed me from my throne, has said: 'Wine is a mocker, strong drink is riotous; and whosoever reeleth thereby is not wise.' (Prov. xx, 1.) Although this was said by my enemy, I shall heed his advice, for it is a wise saying." But his thirst became unbearable, and finally he drank of the wine until his senses were overpowered and he fell into a deep sleep. Benaiah at once came down from his hiding place and fastened the chain around the neck of Asmodeus. The king of the demons, on awakening, grew angry and tried to free himself, but Benaiah called to him: "Beware! The name of the Lord is upon you. Now," added Benaiah holding on to the other end of the chain, "follow me to the court of King Solomon, for he has a certain request to make of you."

The king of the demons permitted himself to be led by Benaiah. On the way to the court of Solomon, Asmodeus acted most peculiarly. He

brushed against a palm-tree and uprooted it; and he knocked against a house and overturned it. He was about to overthrow a hut belonging to a poor woman. The woman pleaded with him and said: "Pray do not upset my hut for I am a widow and very poor."

As he turned aside from her hut, Asmodeus broke a bone in his leg, whereupon he remarked: "My enemy, King Solomon, rightly said: 'And a soft tongue breaketh the bone.'" (Prov. xxv, 15.)

After that he saw a blind man going astray and he set him in the right path. He noticed a drunkard who seemed to be lost, and he set him too on the right path. When a wedding party passed them, Asmodeus wept.

"Why do you weep?" asked Benaiah.

"Because I know that the bridegroom has not a month to live," answered the demon.

Then Asmodeus heard a man say to his shoemaker: "Make me a pair of shoes to last me seven years." The king of the demons laughed.

"Why do you laugh now?" asked Benaiah.

"Because I know that the man will not live another seven days," replied the king of the demons.

Asmodeus then saw a magician who was showing his skill to the people of a certain town, and he laughed heartily.

"Now, why do you laugh?" asked Benaiah.

"The magician pretends to disclose secrets,"

replied the king of the demons, "and he knows not that a buried treasure is under his very feet."

Finally Benaiah arrived at Jerusalem with his prisoner, and after three days the king of the demons was led before Solomon. Asmodeus took a cane four ells long, and, throwing it before Solomon, remarked: "At the end of your days this will be the measure of your grave. Why then do you strive for greatness, and why did you trouble me to come to you from the end of the world?"

"It was not my intention to trouble you, nor to look for conquests," answered Solomon. "The Lord God has ordered me to build a Temple in His name, and I cannot build it without possessing the shamir. Tell me where the shamir can be found, and I shall set you free."

"The shamir is not in my possession," answered the demon. "It was given by God to the Angel of the Sea, and the Angel of the Sea has entrusted it to the moor-hen, who has taken an oath to watch the shamir carefully. The moor-hen carries the shamir with her to the mountains which are not inhabited by men. By means of it, she splits the mountains, and injects seeds, which grow and cover the naked rocks so that they can be inhabited.

2. *The Shamir Brought to Solomon*

Upon receiving this report from the king of the demons, Solomon called for one of his trustworthy servants and said to him: "Take this glass, go and

seek the nest of the moor-hen. When you find it, lay this glass over it."

The servant went forth to do the will of the king, and after a long search he found the nest of the moor-hen with little ones in it. He placed the glass, which had been given to him by Solomon, on the top of the nest, and he sat down at a distance to watch the outcome.

The moor-hen arrived with food for her little ones, but she was unable to break through the glass. She flew away and after some time she returned with the shamir in her mouth. She placed the shamir on the glass and the glass split in two. The king's servant had observed all this, and just at the right moment he so frightened the bird that she dropped the shamir and flew away. The man took possession of the stone and returned to Solomon. The moor-hen was so greatly distressed at having broken her oath to the Angel of the Sea that she killed herself.

Now when Solomon obtained possession of the wonderful shamir, he started the building of the Temple. It took seven years to construct it. During this period of time, not a single workman, who was employed about it, died or fell sick. After the dedication of the Temple, however, all the workmen died so that they might not build similar structures for the heathens and their gods. Their wages for building the Temple they were to receive from God in the world to come.

3. *The Dedication of the Temple*

When the Temple was completed, all the people gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the great event. King Solomon then ordered that the Ark be brought into the Holy of Holies. But the gates of the sacred chamber suddenly locked themselves, and the king's attendants were unable to open them.

Solomon offered twenty-four different prayers to God, but the gates still remained locked. He then said: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in."

The gates to the sacred chamber wished to swallow King Solomon, saying: "Whom dost thou refer to as the 'King of glory?' "

"The Lord is strong and mighty," answered Solomon. But when the gates still refused to unlock themselves, Solomon continued: "Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and if you will ask me, 'Who is the king of Glory?' I will respond, 'The Lord of hosts, He is the King of glory.' "

For all that, the gates remained locked and Solomon was unable to carry the Ark into the Holy of Holies. At last the king prayed to God thus: "O Lord, remember the good deeds of David Thy servant." As soon as Solomon mentioned the name of King David, the Holy of Holies opened of its

own accord. The enemies of David then had to admit that God had wholly forgiven him his sin.

Solomon made a dedication feast for the people, who danced and made merry to the sound of many bands of music. The wife of Solomon, the daughter of the king of Egypt, made a feast also, at which she had her attendants play upon a thousand different musical instruments which she had brought with her from her home, and the names of the Egyptian idols were mentioned aloud by the queen. The rejoicing at the queen's feast, at which the king was present by invitation, surpassed the rejoicing at the dedication feasts. The voices of the queen's singers drowned out the holy voices of the Levites, who were singing hymns to God. God became wroth with Solomon and said: "A time will come, when this city will be destroyed and the Temple will be consumed by flames."

At night, when Solomon went to sleep, he took the key of the Temple and put it under his pillow. His heathen wife, the daughter of the king of Egypt, spread over the bed of Solomon a piece of tapestry studded with pearls and diamonds, which gleamed and glittered like the constellations in the sky. Whenever Solomon wished to rise, he saw these stars, and thinking it was still night, he slept on until the fourth hour after dawn.

Meantime the people had gathered around the Temple and were waiting for the king to come with the key so that the priests might begin the

service at the Temple. They murmured against Solomon for delaying the regular service of God. Solomon's mother, Bath-sheba, immediately entered the chamber of the king, aroused him from his sleep, and rebuked him with the words: "It does not become the king to drink wine." Solomon thanked his mother for arousing him from his sleep. He admitted to her that he had been wrong in allowing himself to be influenced by his heathen queen, the daughter of the king of Egypt.

"My son," said Bath-sheba, "all know that your father David was a God-fearing man, and now people will say, 'Solomon is the son of Bath-sheba, it is his mother's fault if he goes astray.' When your father was alive, the prophet Nathan announced in the name of God that a son would be born to the king whose name would be Solomon, and that he would be worthy of succeeding King David. Each of your father's wives made vows and offered prayers that a son worthy to reign over Israel be born to her. I, too, prayed and made a vow that if Solomon were born to me, I would bring him up so that he would bring peace to his people and to the whole world. My prayer was accepted by God and he gave me a son worthy to reign over Israel and to build God's Temple; but now this son of mine is forgetting the Lord who gave him wisdom and greatness and is pursuing after vanity."

When Solomon left the palace of the daughter

of the king of Egypt to go to the Temple, he was met by Jeroboam of the tribe of Ephraim, who was accompanied by eighty thousand men.

"What is your desire?" asked King Solomon of Jeroboam.

"My lord is king over Israel," replied Jeroboam, "and all Israel looks up to him. Now if he so lightly esteems the service at the Temple on the very first day of its dedication, it surely shall be lightly esteemed by his subjects."

God thereupon said to Jeroboam: "Thou shalt have a taste of the kingship, and thou wilt see whether thou wast justified in rebuking the king or not."

Chapter XII

THE GREATNESS OF SOLOMON

1. *His Throne*

HE throne of Solomon was no less magnificent than the Temple itself. No one before his time and no one since could produce a work of art like that of the throne. When kings and princes saw the beautiful structure, they fell down in astonishment and praised God. The throne was covered with fine gold and studded with emeralds, rubies, pearls and all manner of gems. It had six steps, and on each step there were two golden lions and two golden eagles, a lion and an eagle to the left and a lion and an eagle to the right. The pairs stood face to face, so that the right paw of the lion was opposite the left wing of the eagle, and his left paw was opposite the right wing of the eagle.

On the first step leading to the royal seat crouched a golden ox, and opposite him a golden lion. On the second step crouched a golden wolf, and opposite him a golden lamb. On the third step crouched a golden leopard, and opposite him

a golden goat. On the fourth step perched a golden eagle, and opposite it a golden peacock. On the fifth step crouched a golden cat, and opposite him perched a golden cock. On the sixth step perched a hawk, and opposite him a sparrow. At the very top rested a dove with her claws set on a hawk. Over the seat hung a candlestick, with seven branches extending from each side. On the branches at the right were the images of the seven patriarchs of the world, Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Job. On the branches at the left were engraved the images of the seven pious men of the world, Levi, Kohath, Amram, Moses, Aaron, Eldad and Medad. Attached to the top of the candlestick was a golden bowl filled with the purest olive oil, to be used for the candlestick in the Temple. To the base of the candlestick was attached a golden basin, also filled with the purest olive oil, to be used for the candlestick over the throne. On this basin was engraved the image of the high priest Eli, and on the faucets protruding from the basin were engraved the images of his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, and on the tubes, connecting the faucets with the basin, were engraved the images of Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron.

On the upper part of the throne there were two seats, one for the high priest and one for his vicar. There also stood seventy golden chairs for the seventy members of the Sanhedrin, who took their

seats to the right and to the left of the king when they judged the people.

The machinery of the throne was put in motion as soon as Solomon set his foot on the first step. The golden ox arose and put the king on the second step, and then he was conducted from step to step by the beasts guarding it, until he reached the sixth step where the eagles received him and placed him upon his seat. A great eagle set the royal crown upon Solomon's head, as soon as he was seated. Thereupon a huge golden snake rolled itself up against the machinery, forcing all the lions and the eagles upward until they encircled the head of the king. Then a golden dove came down from a pillar, took the sacred scroll out of an ark and gave it to the king.

Solomon, together with the high priest and the Sanhedrin, judged the people and decided all cases that were brought to them. When there was any suspicion as to the truth of the statement made by a witness, the machinery of the throne was set in motion by the king. He touched one of the buttons of the huge snake, and the ox lowed, the lion roared, the wolf howled, the lamb bleated, the leopard growled, the cat mewed, the cock crowed, the hawk screeched, and the sparrow chirped. By the commotion thus raised the witness was terrified and refrained from giving false testimony.

2. *King Solomon and the Queen of the Ants*

Solomon had a magic carpet, sixty miles square, on which he flew so swiftly through the air that he could eat breakfast in Damascus and supper in Media. The four chiefs among the king's attendants carried out his orders whenever he desired to take a ride through the air. Asaph ben Berachiah among men, Ramirat among demons, the lion among beasts, and the eagle among birds took hold of the four ends of the carpet, raised it slightly, and up went the magic carpet into the air with Solomon and myriads of attendants upon it. It carried Solomon on the wings of the wind wherever he wished to go.

One day, it happened that a feeling of pride came over King Solomon while he was sailing through the air on his magic carpet. He said to himself: "There is no one like me; upon no one else has God bestowed so much wisdom, knowledge and power." Immediately the wind stopped blowing for an instant, one end of the magic carpet slid down, and forty thousand men dropped from the carpet. Solomon was greatly grieved and he addressed the wind: "Awake, O wind, and carry me on your wings again."

"If you will return to God, and subdue your pride," answered the wind, "I, too, will return and do your bidding."

Solomon repented his sin, and the wind carried him on its wings again.

Once while flying on the magic carpet, King Solomon passed the valley of ants. He heard one ant exclaim to the others: "Withdraw you ants, lest you be crushed by the armies of Solomon." The king halted in his flight and angrily asked the ant: "Who are you to give orders to the ants?"

"I am the queen of the ants," replied the ant.

"I desire to ask you an insignificant question," said Solomon.

"If you desire to ask aught of me," replied the ant, "then place me on the palm of your hand, so that you do not stand higher than I do."

Solomon stooped down and placed the ant on the palm of his hand; then the ant said: "Now you can ask your question."

"Is there any one in this world greater than I am?" asked Solomon.

"Yes," replied the queen, "there is one greater than you."

"And who may it be?" asked the astonished king.

"Even I am greater than you," retorted the queen.

"How is that possible?" questioned Solomon.

"Were I not greater than you," stated the queen, "God would not have led you to this place to put me on the palm of your hand."

Angered by this retort, Solomon threw the

queen to the ground, and said: "Do you not know who I am? I am Solomon, the son of David, and king of Jerusalem."

Not frightened by Solomon's words, the queen of the ants said: "I know that you are dust and to dust will you return."

The king left the valley of ants very much abashed and with his pride greatly subdued.

3. *The Golden Palace*

One day, Solomon and thousands of his men seated themselves on the magic carpet, and Solomon ordered the wind to carry them on its wings to the remotest part of the world. For seven days and seven nights the carpet flew in the air, until it came to a magnificent palace made of pure gold. Here Solomon halted, descended to the ground, and he and Asaph ben Berachiah sought to enter the golden palace; but in vain; no entrance leading into the palace could be found.

Thereupon Solomon called Ramirat, the captain of the demons, and said to him: "Call together your great host of demons and let them ascertain if there is any man, beast or bird to be found within this palace."

At a sign of the captain, demons in great hosts surrounded the golden palace. After they had made a long search, Solomon asked Ramirat: "What is your report?"

"My hosts came upon no living creature in the

palace," replied the captain of the demons, "except an eagle that has his nest on the roof."

Solomon thereupon summoned the eagle, and inquired of him: "How old are you?"

"I am seven hundred years old," replied the eagle.

"Do you possess any knowledge as to the location of the entrance to this palace?" asked King Solomon.

"I do not possess such knowledge," replied the eagle; "but my older brother may know something about it."

Then Solomon called for the eagle's older brother and he said to him: "How old are you?"

"I am one thousand and three hundred years old," replied the aged eagle.

"Do you know where the entrance to this palace is?" asked the king.

"I have never seen the entrance myself," replied the old eagle. "But I remember having heard my father say that there was a door on the west side of the palace, but that it had been covered up by the dust of the ages that had elapsed since it was last used."

Solomon thereupon ordered the wind to scatter the dust to the four corners of the earth, and an iron door was disclosed underneath, which bore the following inscription: "We, who dwell in this palace, have lived in pleasure and luxury for many years. Now a famine has broken out and we have

ground pearls into flour instead of wheat; but to no avail. So now that we are about to die from hunger we leave this palace as an abode for the eagles." Solomon then found another inscription on the door: "He who has neither reigned nor prophesied shall not enter this palace."

The king discovered a niche on the right side of the gate in which there was a glass receptacle containing a key. With this key he opened a gate made of pure gold, and on entering the palace he inspected the wonderful building, the apartments of which were constructed of pearls and precious stones.

In one of the chambers, Solomon saw a number of statues, among them one that looked as though it were alive. Above the door of this chamber there was this inscription: "The king who dwelt in this palace was very powerful, and was always happy, but death came and took him away in the prime of his life." Solomon approached the lifelike statue and touched it. Immediately, it called out in a loud voice: "Hither, ye sons of Satan, the hand of a mortal has touched me." Suddenly there arose a great noise among the statues, and the sons of Satan threatened to take the life of Solomon.

"Away, ye sons of Satan!" called out the king angrily. "Do you not know that I am Solomon, your king?"

Quiet was restored, and the sons of Satan were

so terrified that they ran into the sea and were drowned. From the neck of the lifelike statue Solomon took a silver plate upon which were inscribed characters he could not read. Solomon in despair searched for a learned man to read the inscription. Finally he found a youth from the desert who read the inscription for him: "I, Shadad ben Ad, have slain a million heroes; have ruled over many thousand provinces; and have had a thousand kings under me; but when the Angel of Death approached me, I was powerless."

Solomon was impressed by the words of King Shadad, and all trace of pride left him.

4. *No One Can Frustrate God's Plan*

Keziah, one of the daughters of King Solomon, was a maiden of great beauty and profound wisdom. The king was very fond of her and therefore he was anxious to know to whom she would be wedded. At the request of Solomon, the high priest asked of the Urim and Thummim who her husband would be, and the reply was: "A very poor youth will marry thy daughter."

Solomon was displeased with the information. He called for fifty of his most trustworthy attendants and said to them: "Now I wish to entrust you with a secret mission; if you disclose it to any living being, you shall each of you die a horrible death. Take one of my largest ships, journey to the farthest of my islands, and there build a high

tower without doors or entrances, surrounded by a very high wall. Your departure and your return shall not be known to any man. When the tower is completed, furnish it with costly furniture, and then return to me."

After a time the fifty men returned to Jerusalem, and reported to the king that the tower with the high wall around it was completed, and they showed the king the plan of the tower. The king was pleased with the work. He bade the men return to him after two weeks.

During that time Solomon informed his daughter Keziah that she would go shortly on a long journey to some unknown destination, where she would have to remain for an indefinite length of time. He advised her to provide herself with wearing apparel and other necessities so that she might lack for nothing while there. Solomon expected his daughter to protest against such solitary confinement, but to his surprise she gayly told him that she was ready to go wherever her royal father might see fit.

After two weeks the king told the fifty men to whom he had confided the secret mission to get ready to depart with his daughter to the island where the tower was built. He told them to take enough food with them to last the princess for several months and to leave the food in the tower, for his daughter was to remain there in solitary confinement for an indefinite period of time.

Arrived at the tower, the fifty men stored it with a huge quantity of food, and they brought the beautiful Keziah to the top of the tower by means of a ladder. They left her there and took the ladder away with them in their ship. There the princess lived in solitude for many days, and all that she could do was to ascend to the top of the tower and examine the rough sea around the island.

After a few months Solomon summoned the largest of all the eagles, and said to him: "You are to come daily into my main cuisine, and from there you are to take the best of food and drink and convey it to my daughter Keziah who is confined in a tower on the farthermost island of the sea." The eagle fulfilled the king's command, and the princess obtained her daily food from the cuisine of the king.

Now in those days, there lived a poor man in Accho who had a son, named Reuben. Reuben possessed great knowledge and learning, and was very handsome in appearance. As the lad's poor father was unable to provide for his children, Reuben left his home and wandered aimlessly about to look for some work whereby he could earn enough to support himself and help his family.

One cold night, Reuben happened to be wandering in the wilderness. He could find no place to rest his head. The night grew colder and

The large eagle daily carried food to the princess in the tower

colder and the poor lad had no shelter from the cold where he might lie down and keep warm until the morning. As he looked about, he discovered the torn carcass of an ox on the ground. In this he lay down to keep warm. When he was fast asleep, a large vulture came, fastened his talons in the carcass and carried it, with the lad stretched out in it, to the roof of the tower in which the princess lived. The bird ate some of the flesh of the carcass and then flew back to the wilderness leaving Reuben on the roof still fast asleep.

In the early morning, the princess, as was her custom, ascended to the roof of the tower to look out upon the sea. To her amazement she saw a carcass of an ox and, upon closer examination, a youth lying in it. She awakened him from his sleep and said: "Who are you, and who has brought you hither?"

"I am an Israelite from Accho," replied the dumbfounded youth. "I wandered away from the house of my parents to look for work to support my poor parents and myself. Last night when it grew intensely cold, I could find no place where I might keep warm and rest my head, so I lay down in the carcass of the ox, and now I am here."

The princess was astonished when she heard this tale from the youth, and she as well as the youth arrived at the conclusion that he must have been carried to the roof of the tower by a huge

bird. She took pity on the poor lad, and showed him a chamber where he could wash himself and put on new clothes. Then it appeared that he possessed extraordinary beauty, deep learning and great knowledge. The princess invited him to remain in the palace with her, for it was impossible to descend from the tower, and since no ship ever passed the island, there was no way for him to leave.

The eagle who brought the princess her daily food, now noticed that there was somebody else in the tower with the princess, and from then on he brought double portions of food from the king's cuisine.

Keziah and Reuben grew very fond of one another, and at the proposal of the princess they became husband and wife. Reuben opened one of his veins and wrote the marriage contract with his own blood, and he called upon God and the archangels Michael and Gabriel to witness the ceremony.

After several years, the eagle that brought the daily food to the tower noticed that a baby had been added to the family in the tower, and from that time on he would bring food enough for three persons.

Many years passed and one day the king summoned the eagle and asked him about the princess in the tower. The eagle replied that the princess, her husband and their baby were all in good

health. The king was not a little surprised at the report of the eagle, and he immediately set out to visit his beloved daughter. The princess admitted that she was married, and introduced her husband and her baby to the king. Solomon was very much pleased with his son-in-law, for although Reuben was poor yet he distinguished himself in wisdom and learning. Upon learning of the remarkable manner in which the youth had come to the tower, Solomon said: "Now I see that none can frustrate the will of the Almighty."

Solomon brought the happy couple and their child to Jerusalem, where a great banquet was given in their honor, and their wedding anniversary was celebrated with great pomp.

Chapter XIII

The Queen of Sheba

1. *In the City of Kitor*

ING SOLOMON ruled not only over men, but also over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the sea, the demons and the spirits. He understood the language of all of them and could converse with them.

When the king was of good cheer and desired to entertain his visitors and his vassal kings who came from all over the world to see his greatness, he summoned the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the demons and spirits to perform their dances before the assembly. Once it happened that the cock of the prairie was missed from among the assembled birds of the air, and could nowhere be found. The king was very angry at the disobedience of the cock of the prairie, and commanded that he be brought before him for punishment. The eagles flew off in search of him and brought him before Solomon.

"Why did you fail to respond to my call?" asked Solomon wrathfully.

"O lord, king of the world, pray listen to my words," pleaded the cock of the prairie. "Three months ago I made a certain resolution. I desired to know if there was any domain in this world which did not know of my lord, the king, nor paid him tribute. I have eaten no food and have drunk no water for ninety days and ninety nights, and I have flown about in the whole world in order to find such a kingdom. At last I found a city, the city of Kitor, in the far East. There gold is less valuable than dust, and silver is as plentiful as the mud of the earth. The parks and orchards there have been in existence since the creation of the world, and are watered by the rivers flowing from the Garden of Eden. The people there are always happy, and live in peace; they know not how to fight, nor do they know how to shoot with bow and arrow. Their ruler is a woman who is called the Queen of Sheba. This kingdom is the only one that is not ruled over by my lord the king. Now if it please you, O lord and king, I shall fly back to that city, fetter their rulers with chains, and bring them before my lord the king."

Solomon thereupon called for his clerks, and had them write a letter to the Queen of Sheba, which read: "From me, King Solomon! Peace be with you, and peace be with all your people! Be it known to you that God has appointed me king over the beasts of the field, the birds of the air, the fishes of the seas, the demons and the spirits.

If you will come and do me homage, I will show you great honor, more than I have shown any of the kings that acknowledge my overlordship. Should you fail to come and pay me homage, I shall send my great armies against you. Should you ask, 'Who are these armies of King Solomon?' I should tell you: 'The birds of the air are my cavalry, the beasts of the field and the demons and the spirits are my legions.' At my beck and call they shall swarm over your land, and no one shall be able to rise up against them."

This letter the clerks of the king tied to the wing of the cock of the prairie. The bird rose skyward, uttered his cry, and flew away, followed by all the other birds.

When the birds came to Kitor, it was morning and the queen had gone forth to worship the sun. Suddenly the light of the sun was darkened by the vast flock of birds. The queen raised her head and exclaimed: "Alas, what has happened this morning that I cannot behold the sweet light of the sun?" Then the cock of the prairie alighted near her, and when she saw that a letter was tied to his wing, she unfastened it and read it.

The Queen of Sheba was greatly disturbed by the contents of the letter, and she rent her clothes in great anguish. She sent for her advisers and elders and read the letter to them. They were not much moved by the words of King Solomon and said to the queen: "We know nothing of King

Solomon, and his dominion we regard as naught." But the queen was not satisfied with the words of her advisers. She gathered all her ships and loaded them with gold, pearls and precious stones. In addition, she sent to Solomon six thousand youths and maidens, born in the same year, and in the same month, on the same day, and in the same hour. All were of equal size and stature, and were clothed in purple garments. She gave them a letter to King Solomon which read: "From the city of Kitor to the land of Israel is a journey of seven years. But in order to hear your wisdom, I will not rest on my way but make haste and be in Jerusalem at the end of three years."

2. *The Queen of Sheba Arrives in Jerusalem*

When the time for the arrival of the Queen of Sheba drew near, Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada to meet her. As the queen was riding in her chariot she saw at a distance something which seemed like a beautiful lily growing in a brook of water. As she drew nearer, it seemed to change into the appearance of the evening star that outshines all others. As she drew still nearer, the apparition changed again and looked like the flush in the eastern sky at break of day. When she came close to the object she saw that it was nothing else but Benaiah with his army of men. The queen descended from her chariot to do Benaiah honor, and when she was beside him, Benaiah

asked her: "Why did your majesty descend from the chariot?"

"Why, are you not King Solomon?" she asked in return.

"I am not King Solomon," replied Benaiah; "I am merely one of the servants that stand in his presence."

Then the queen turned to her nobles and said: "If we have not beheld the lion, we have at least seen his lair; if we have not beheld King Solomon, we have at least seen the beauty of him that stands in his presence."

Solomon prepared to receive the queen in a house made of glass. As Benaiah conducted her before the king, it appeared to her that the king was floating on water. As she stepped across to the king she raised her garment to keep it dry.

The Queen of Sheba then said to King Solomon: "I have heard of you, O king, and of your wisdom; will you now answer me if I ask you some riddles?"

The king replied: "The Lord giveth wisdom."

The queen: "What kind of water is that which does not descend from on high, nor comes from the depths or from the rocks; at times it is sweeter than honey, at other times bitter as gall, although it always flows from the same source?"

Solomon: "It is tears."

The queen: "Tell me who is the wretch that is buried while he is still alive? The more he rots the

more life he obtains; and they that buried him receive a manifold reward!"

Solomon: "It is a grain of seed."

The queen: "The dead lived, the grave moved, and the dead prayed!"

Solomon: "Jonah swallowed by the whale."

The queen: "Who was he that was born and died not?"

Solomon: "Elijah."

The queen: "What was that which was not born, yet life was given to it?"

Solomon: "The golden calf."

The queen asked Solomon many more riddles and he answered them all. She then ordered that the six thousand youths and girls she had brought from her land be summoned before Solomon, and pointing to them said to the king: "Now tell me which of them are male and which are female?"

The king ordered a basin full of water to be placed before each and every one of the youths and the girls. All of them were to wash their hands and faces, and no towels were given them to dry themselves with. The girls immediately wiped their hands and faces with their aprons as they were wont to do, while the boys were at a loss. The king then ordered that a great quantity of nuts and candy be given to the strangers, and that each and every one be given more than their hands could hold. The males at once raised their skirts and piled up in the fold the nuts and

candy they could not hold in their hands, while the females were ashamed to do so and took merely whatever their palms could hold. King Solomon thus separated the males from the females, and said to the queen: "These are males and those are females."

Then the queen said to Solomon: "Verily, your wisdom excels the fame thereof. Blessed be your God."

3. *The Mysterious Box*

One day Solomon and the Queen of Sheba were riding on horseback in the suburbs of Jerusalem, and when they came to a very beautiful field they alighted and sat down to rest. There they heard the sweet voice of a woman singing merrily of her joy in her husband and children, and of her great happiness to which even the happiness of King Solomon could not be compared. The Queen of Sheba then turned to Solomon and said: "You said that you have not found one good woman among a thousand; now here is such a woman."

"Is it your desire that I test this woman?" asked the king. "If so, let us enter the house of the happy family and we will put her to the test."

The farmer and his wife were greatly surprised upon seeing the two sovereigns approaching their humble house. They were put at ease, however, when the king greeted them kindly as he entered the house. The king then said: "I will return

toward evening, for I wish to leave something in your possession for several days."

Thereupon Solomon took a golden box, put a little white mouse into it together with some crumbs of bread, and said to the Queen of Sheba: "This will test the happy woman; we shall see whether she is really one out of a thousand."

Toward evening the two rulers returned to the house of the happy farmer and his wife, and King Solomon said to them: "Here I put this small golden box in a corner of your room. It should remain in this place for three days and three nights. You shall neither move it about nor open it. If you will obey my command, you shall be rewarded by me royally; should you disobey me, you will forfeit your lives." And turning to the husband, Solomon said: "Here is the key with which I have locked this little box. Keep it with you until I return three days hence." The two rulers took leave of the happy couple and returned to Jerusalem.

At the evening meal, the woman said to her husband: "I wonder what the king has hidden in this mysterious box? Has he filled it with precious stones, or has he put in it some mysterious things with which he practices witchcraft?"

"Why think about the box?" said the husband. "Let it remain there until the king comes back, and let us attend to our business just as before."

On the following day, when the husband

returned from his work at midday, the woman would taste no food and drink no water, and when her husband noticed her behavior, he asked: "Why do you not eat or drink? Have you received any bad news from your parents, or has anything untoward happened?"

"Cursed be the moment in which the king entrusted this mysterious box to our possession!" cried out the woman. "All night long I was unable to sleep, and in the morning when I closed my eyes in sleep, I was haunted by dreadful dreams and visions. Ah, if I only knew what this box contains!"

"Why talk about the box?" asked the husband in despair. "Do you not know that we shall forfeit our lives even if we only move that box about? Try to forget it, and let us have peace in the house."

In the evening when the husband returned from his work in the field, he found his wife lying in bed crying and weeping. He was very much grieved, and he approached her and said: "What has happened to you, my good wife? Do you really wish that the two of us forfeit our lives to the king? Pray, forget the box."

"If you are really anxious for my welfare," said the woman weeping bitterly, "then let us go over to that box, and let me peep through the keyhole. To tell you the truth, while you were away in the field, I approached the box several times with

the intention of examining it. But great terror overtook me and I refrained from coming close to it. Now, the king has only commanded us neither to move the box nor to open it, but he did not tell us not to look at it and examine it. Come then, let us just examine it."

The couple went over to the corner where the mysterious box stood, and the inquisitive woman peeped through the keyhole but saw nothing. She put her ear next to the keyhole, but heard nothing. She then exclaimed: "There is no use, we cannot tell what the box contains unless we open it."

"What!" exclaimed the husband in great terror. "Do you not realize that it means death for the two of us, if we open it? You had better go to bed, and forget all about it."

The following day, while the husband was working in the field, his oldest son called for him, saying that his mother was dying, and that she wished to talk to her husband before she passed away. When they reached home, the husband found his wife lying in bed weeping bitterly. She turned to her husband and said: "For two days and two nights I have tasted no food and have drunk no water. Oh, what horrors are haunting me! Demons and evil spirits are constantly jumping out of that little box, threatening to choke me. One of them even jumped on my bed and said to me: 'If you do not open that box and release me, I

will choke you and tear you apart limb by limb.' I am going to be killed by the evil spirits, if I do not open that box, so please let me open it just a trifle. I will just peep into it and close it at once again. Nobody will know anything about it, not even Solomon himself, and my life will be saved."

The sobs and supplications of the woman moved the heart of her husband, and he exclaimed: "Before this accursed little box came into our possession, we lived a happy life; now life has become intolerable. Come, I will open that box to satisfy your ridiculous dreams and boundless curiosity. I am ready to die to satisfy you."

He took the box and brought it over to the table. He opened it with the key that had been given to him by Solomon, but no sooner had he lifted the lid than the little white mouse jumped out and vanished somewhere in the house. Nothing else was to be seen in the box.

"It is all your fault," cried the disappointed woman. "I told you to open it but a little and you opened it wider. If you had listened to me, the mouse would not have escaped."

"I admit it was my fault," said the husband. "I should not have listened to you at all."

On the third day Solomon and the Queen of Sheba came to reclaim the box. They were met by the woman, who was weeping bitterly: "Pray my lord and king, forgive me, for it was not I who opened the box. Oh, pray spare my life!"

"It is indeed my fault," said the husband. "I allowed myself to be persuaded by a woman and so forfeited my life. Now I am ready to die. Spare this woman, for I alone opened it and not she."

"Tell the queen and myself the whole truth, and no harm shall befall you," said the king. "For it was not my intention to disturb the peace of your house, I simply wished to test you."

The honest farmer then told the two potentates all that had occurred between him and his wife from the time the box had been left in his possession up to the time it was opened. The wife agreed that all her husband said was true. When the Queen of Sheba heard the story she said: "Verily, King, you are as wise as an angel of God."

Chapter XIV

SOLOMON AND ASMODEUS

1. *Asmodeus King of Jerusalem*

ALTHOUGH Asmodeus had been captured by Solomon only for the purpose of obtaining the shamir, the king kept him a long time after the completion of the Temple. One day, Solomon said to Asmodeus, while they were both alone in the room: "You demons boast of your great and wonderful powers. If your king can be held prisoner by a mortal, wherein really lies your strength and greatness?"

"If you will but remove this chain from me and give me your ring upon which is engraved the Name of God, I will show you wherein my greatness lies," replied the king of the demons.

Solomon at once removed the chain from Asmodeus and gave him his protecting ring. The demon then stood before the king with one of his wings touching heaven and the other reaching to the earth. He snatched up Solomon, who had parted with his protecting ring, and flung him a distance of four hundred parasangs from Jerusalem.

Asmodeus then put on the king's crown, ascended the throne and, concealing his wings, he assumed the form of Solomon. He called for the attendants of the king and said to them: "I could no longer bear the presence of Asmodeus, king of the demons, so I drove him away to a far-off desolate land, from which he can never come back. From now on, Benaiah ben Johaiada shall no longer appear in my presence, until I give him word."

The attendants bowed in obedience to the supposed king who had ascended the throne and who remained for some time ruler over Israel.

2. *Solomon as Beggar*

Solomon, having recovered from the shock of his flight and fall, looked about him. He saw nothing but waste land. Unprotected from the beasts of the desert, and without food and drink, he wandered about for several days until at last he met some shepherd boys, and he asked them: "Pray tell me, is this place very far from Jerusalem, where Solomon, son of David, is king?"

"We have never heard of such a city," replied the youngsters, "nor have we ever heard of such a king."

Solomon then met an old man coming from the field. To him he put the same question, and the old man, too, replied that he had never heard of such a city nor of such a king. Solomon was aston-

ished and he said to himself: "And I really thought there was not a place on this earth where my name and fame were unknown. Now I see that I was mistaken."

Solomon then came upon the home of a Jewish family, and upon entering the house he said to them: "Do not regard my old clothes and my torn shoes, for I am really Solomon, king of Jerusalem. But misfortunes have befallen me and now I am wandering about begging for food."

The people laughed at him and said: "It is too bad about you, poor fellow. Not only did God deprive you of means of support, but He also deprived you of your mind." They gave him food and drink, and the banished king wandered on further, telling everybody that he was the king of Jerusalem, only to be taken everywhere for a lunatic by the incredulous people.

One day, Solomon met an old acquaintance, who was a rich and well-known man. The rich man recognized the king, gave him new garments and sandals, and made a feast in honor of Solomon. At the meal the host constantly reminded Solomon and the guests of the magnificence and splendor he had seen at the court of the king. These reminders moved the king to tears, and he left the man's house weeping bitterly.

The following day he came upon a poor man who addressed him thus: "I know that you are King Solomon in disguise, for I have had the

great honor of seeing you in Jerusalem. Would you not honor me, O lord my king, and break bread under my roof?" Solomon followed the man into the house. All the poor man could offer his guest was a dish of greens. The poor man noticed Solomon's grief, and said to him: "O my lord and king, the Lord, God of Israel, has sworn to David that the royal dignity will never depart from his house. Despair not therefore, my lord, for our good God will surely restore you to your kingdom and glory, and your name will once more resound from one end of the world to the other."

The dejected king was greatly encouraged by the words of the poor man, and was very grateful to him. He then thought of the great feast given in his honor by the rich man who had only put salt on his wounds by reminding him of his former glory. And Solomon said: "Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith."

3. *Solomon Restored to His Kingdom*

For three years King Solomon was an outcast, because he had transgressed three commandments of God—"The king set over thee . . . shall not multiply horses to himself . . . neither shall he multiply wives to himself; neither shall he greatly multiply to himself silver and gold." (Deut. xvii, 16-17.) King Solomon begged from door to door, saying, "I am Solomon, king of Israel!" But the

people mocked him, for they were certain that King Solomon was sitting in state on his throne in Jerusalem.

One day the royal wanderer came to the capital city of Ammon, where he found himself in dire need. But the master cook of the king's house took pity on Solomon and made him his assistant. After Solomon had worked in the kitchen for some time, he one day cooked some meats for the king; and when the king tasted the meats Solomon had baked, he was well pleased, and he raised Solomon to the post of chief cook.

Naamah, the daughter of the king of Ammon, saw Solomon from day to day, and she fell in love with the cook. She went to her mother and said: "I shall die of a broken heart, unless I am given the head cook as husband."

The queen was astonished and ashamed and said to the princess: "There are kings, princes and nobles in Ammon; marry whichever of them you will."

"I will have none save the head cook," Naamah answered.

When the king learned from the queen of the princess' determination, he wished to slay both Solomon and Naamah; but when his anger cooled down, he bade one of his servants to take both Solomon and Naamah, lead them into the desert, and there leave them to perish. Solomon and Naamah were thus left in the wilderness without

food. They wandered on until they came to the borders of the sea. There Solomon found some fishermen for whom he agreed to work. In payment for his services, he received every day two fishes.

Thus time passed on, till one day, Solomon's wife, Naamah, while cleaning one of the fishes, found in its body a ring which she brought to her husband. Solomon at once recognized it as the ring which he had put in the hand of Asmodeus. The demon had not been able to wear the ring because on it was engraved the Name of God, and he had cast it into the sea where the fish had swallowed it. Solomon was filled with great joy, and with great haste he returned with Naamah to Jerusalem.

When Solomon told the people of Jerusalem that he was their king, they considered him a lunatic. It came to the ears of the members of the Sanhedrin that there was a lunatic roaming about the streets of Jerusalem who claimed to be the real king of Israel. The elders sent for Benaiah, the chief of the king's men, and said to him: "There is a man who claims to be Solomon. He does not seem to be insane, for we have examined him and he seems to be a very wise and learned man. Can you explain this to us?"

"I have not been invited to see the king for many years," replied Benaiah, "so I am unable to solve this problem."

"Neither have we been called to the king's court for a long time," stated the learned men of the Sanhedrin. "Go and investigate the matter at the king's court. Speak to the king's mother Bath-sheba; she may throw some light on the mystery."

Benaiah was informed by Bath-sheba and other members of the king's court that the behavior of the king had completely changed. He had become rude and ungentlemanly and he acted in no respect as he had been wont to. Benaiah, disregarding the threats of the royal gatekeepers, forced his entrance into the king's palace, and when he looked at the legs of the supposed king, he knew that it was Asmodeus, for the demon had the legs of a cock. Benaiah at once pronounced the Name of God, and Asmodeus uttered a loud piercing cry and vanished through the ceiling of the room.

Thereupon Benaiah went back to the Sanhedrin, called for the beggar in ragged clothes and torn sandals, and, pointing to him, exclaimed: "Long live King Solomon!" Solomon then told the assembly of all that had befallen him, and the wandering beggar and his wife were brought to the royal palace with great pomp and circumstance.

Later on Solomon summoned the king of Ammon and said to him: "Some time ago you had in your employ a chief cook who married princess Naamah. You did not consent to their marriage

and you killed them both. Now you will have to account for their death."

"I did not exactly kill them," replied the king of Ammon. "I merely banished them for the disobedience of my daughter."

At a sign given by Solomon, Queen Naamah appeared wearing a golden crown on her head, and Solomon bade her sit on the throne next to himself. The king of Ammon recognized the daughter he had banished. He was greatly astonished and exclaimed: "How did my daughter ever escape the desert and find favor with the greatest of kings?"

Then said Solomon: "Behold! I was your head cook, and this is your daughter."

The king of Ammon was overjoyed at the happy union, and he returned to his own land with a glad heart.

Chapter XV

ELIJAH

1. *God Gives Elijah the Keys to Rain*

IEL, the Beth-elite, commander-in-chief of the army of Ahab, king of Israel, rebuilt the city of Jericho. Now when Joshua had conquered the city of Jericho, he cursed the one who should rebuild the city with the loss of his sons. The curse was visited upon the commander-in-chief, whose sons now died.

God thereupon said to Elijah the prophet: "Go thou and offer condolence to Hiel for the loss of his sons."

"O Lord!" pleaded Elijah, "I am unable to go and search out the sinners. I know that Hiel is embittered because of the loss of his children. He will undoubtedly utter blasphemous talk against Thee, O Lord, and such talk always calls forth my rage."

"Do not hesitate to go," said God to His prophet, "if the godless utter unholy words, then I shall fulfil whatever curse thou mayest pronounce against them in thy wrath."

When the prophet entered the general's house,

he found King Ahab there also. The commander-in-chief then said to Elijah: "Was not Moses greater than his pupil Joshua? Why then were the words of Joshua fulfilled, and my sons died, but the words of Moses did not come true? For did not Moses say that God would let no rain descend upon the earth, if Israel served idols? There is not a spot in the kingdom of Ahab where there is not an idol, yet there is so much rain that the king is sometimes prevented by it from going to worship the idols!"

Elijah replied: "As the Lord, the God of Israel, before whom I stand, lives, there shall be neither dew nor rain these years, except according to my word."

When Elijah left the house of Hiel, he prayed to God that He give him the key to the store of rain. God thereupon entrusted the key to His Prophet Elijah, and neither dew nor rain watered the land.

There was famine in the land and King Ahab sought to kill Elijah. At the command of God the prophet hid himself near a brook. While in hiding ravens brought him daily fresh food from the pantry of King Ahab.

2. *Elijah Obtains the Key to Resurrection*

God has compassion even upon evil-doers. He tried to induce Elijah to beg for rain. God caused the brook, out of which Elijah drank, to run dry.

Elijah was grieved, but God said to him: "Thou art sorely grieved because thou hast no water to drink, why then hast thou no compassion for the thousands of men, women and children who suffer because of lack of rain?"

The heart of Elijah was not softened, and the famine continued in the land. God thereupon sent Elijah to the house of a widow where he was to abide. The widow had but a little flour left in a jug, just enough to make two small cakes, one for herself and one for her son, who was later to be known as the prophet Jonah. Elijah asked her for a drink of water and a morsel of bread, and the widow baked a cake out of the flour in the jug and gave it to the prophet. God was greatly pleased with the kindness of the woman, who gave away the last cake she had to a stranger, and He said: "The flour in the jug shall never give out, until rain will descend from heaven." And so it was, the widow always obtained enough flour from the small jug for herself, her son and the prophet.

One day the son of the widow took sick and died. The widow thereupon said to Elijah: "Why have you brought this evil upon me?"

"How so?" asked the surprised prophet.

"Before you came into my house," replied the distressed widow, "God was gracious to me, because I was considered worthy in His eyes as compared with my neighbors and the inhabitants of

the town. Now He has abandoned me, because my virtues are considered as nought compared with your great merits."

The prophet was greatly grieved over the loss of the boy, and in his distress he prayed to God that He deliver to him the key to resurrection so that he might be able to bring the child to life again.

God replied to Elijah's supplication, saying: "Of the keys to all treasures only three have I entrusted to no one, but kept them in My possession: the key to rain, the key to the souls to be born, and the key to the resurrection of the dead. Now one of these three, the key to rain, I have given thee already, and if I grant thy request and give thee also the key to resurrection, then the handiwork will have more keys than his Master. Return unto Me the key of rain, and I will let thee have the key to the revival of the dead."

Elijah was thus compelled to yield. He accordingly gave up to God the key to rain and in its stead he took the key to resurrection. With this key he revived the child and brought him down alive from the upper chamber to his greatly astonished mother.

3. *The Miracles on Mount Carmel*

When Elijah surrendered to God the key to rain, the Lord said to him: "Go, show thyself unto Ahab, and I will send rain upon the land."

On his way to King Ahab, Elijah was met by Obadiah, the chief of the household of Ahab. Obadiah recognized the mysterious prophet. He fell on his face before Elijah and said: "Is it you, my lord Elijah?"

"It is I," answered Elijah; "go and tell your king, 'Behold Elijah is here.' "

"There is no nation or kingdom," said Obadiah, "whither the king has not sent messengers to seek you, but no one was able to find you. Now when I leave you, the spirit of the Lord may carry you to a place unknown to me; and so when I come to Ahab and tell him that you are here, and he is unable to find you, he will slay me. And I certainly do not deserve that you thus bring about my death. For has it not been told to my lord how, when Queen Jezebel slew the prophets of the Lord, I hid a hundred prophets, and fed them with bread and water during the famine?"

"As the Lord of hosts lives," said Elijah, "I will show myself to Ahab to-day."

So Obadiah went and told Ahab that Elijah was there, and the king went to meet him. When Ahab spied the prophet, he said: "Is it you, you troubler of Israel?"

"Not I have troubled Israel; but you and your father's house, in that you have forsaken the commandments of God, and have followed the Baalim, those abominable idols," replied Elijah. "Now therefore, gather all Israel unto Mount Carmel,

and the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, all that eat at the queen's table. Give us two bullocks, and let the false prophets select one of the bullocks for themselves and put it on their altar to be sacrificed to Baal. I will then take the second bullock and put it upon my altar to be sacrificed to my God. Let no fire be put under any of the wood on the altars, and the God that answers by fire, let Him be God."

King Ahab thereupon called for Hiel, the Bethelite, his commander-in-chief, and told him what had taken place between him and the prophet Elijah. "Now," said Ahab, "advise me what shall be done."

"I have a good plan," said Hiel. "I will build an altar upon Mount Carmel, and undermine it; and when the time comes, I shall hide myself in the hollow of the altar and set fire to the wood upon it."

"That is a great scheme!" exclaimed the delighted king; "do as you say."

Thereupon the king called together all Israel to Mount Carmel, and also all the priests of the Baal and Ashera, eight hundred and fifty in number. Elijah appeared before the people and laid his plan before them, and the people said not a word.

A pair of twin bullocks were brought to the priests, and it was decided by lot which belonged

to God and which to Baal. Elijah had no difficulty with his bullock, and he led it quickly to his altar. But the priests of Baal, eight hundred and fifty in number, could not make their victim stir. They pulled with all their might, but the bullock remained in his place as if riveted to the ground.

Elijah then approached the bullock and said: "Follow the priests of the Baal, and let the name of the Lord be exalted."

The bullock thereupon opened its mouth and said: "We two, yonder bullock and I, were born at the same time; we were raised together and we took our food from the same manger. Now he has been chosen for God and he will glorify the Divine Name, while I am to be used for Baal and I will draw down upon myself the wrath of my Creator."

"Do follow the priests of Baal," urged Elijah, "lest they will have an excuse and say that I bewitched you and prevented you from going. If you go, you, too, will have a share in the glorification of the name of God for which your brother will be used."

The bullock still remained obstinate and would not stir when pulled by the prophets of Baal. Thereupon Elijah himself led the bullock to the priests of Baal and said: "Here is the bullock that you have chosen. Now you prepare your bullock

first and offer it to your god, because you are in the majority."

The idolatrous priests prepared the bullock, put it on the altar which had been undermined, and began to shout: "O Baal, answer us." Upon hearing their outcry, Hiel, who lay hidden in the hollow of the altar, stretched forth his hand ready to set fire to the wood on the altar, but God sent a serpent to bite Hiel so that he died. In vain did the false prophets cry and call: "Baal! Baal!" The expected flame did not shoot up, and they were sorely grieved. God bade the whole world be silent, and the powers of the upper and of the nether regions remained dumb, it seemed as if there were no living creature in the whole world, God had done this, because if a single sound had made itself heard after the loud shouts of the false prophets, they would have said that it was the voice of Baal. The priests shouted all day long, but there was no audible sound in reply.

Toward evening Elijah had the trench around the altar he had built filled with water, and he prayed to God: "Lord of the world, in time to come Thou wilt send me as a messenger to Thy people, but if Thou dost not hearken to my words now, Thy people cannot be expected to listen to me in later days. Therefore I pray Thee, O Lord, cause a fire to descend from heaven, and let Thy Name be glorified." The prophet's prayer was

heard on high, and a fire fell from heaven upon the altar; it consumed the offering and even licked up the water in the trench.

4. *The Translation of Elijah*

The people in their rage killed the false prophets of Baal, when they saw that the prayers to Baal were not answered. But in spite of all this, the people did not abandon the worship of idols. Elijah was compelled to flee from the wrath of Queen Jezebel, who threatened his life for having caused the death of her priests. He fled to the wilderness again, and there he hid himself in the cleft of the rock in which God had once appeared to Moses, and where He had revealed Himself as merciful and long-suffering. God appeared to Elijah, and the prophet could control his feelings no longer, and accused Israel before Him.

"Instead of pleading for My people, thou accusest them," said God.

"O Lord God," replied Elijah, "they have slain all Thy prophets, and I alone am left, and me too they seek to slay."

"I cannot act as Thou wouldst have Me," said the Lord. "Do not speak thus unto Me. Go to Damascus; there the heathens have an idol for each day of the year, and do all abominable things. Yet I have not ordered the sun to stop shining for them. If Israel has thrown down My altars and slain My prophets, what concern is it of thine?"

As Elijah remained unmoved, God said to him: "Go and appoint Elisha as thy successor."

For three years Elisha followed his teacher Elijah, and wherever they went they taught young men the law of God; thus the number of prophets increased and there was no place in the land where a young prophet was not to be found. At the end of the three years, while Elijah and Elisha were walking together one day, they noticed a chariot of fire drawn by horses of fire. The chariot rode between Elijah and Elisha, separating them, and Elijah was taken up into the chariot and carried to heaven.

"I refuse to let this mortal enter heaven alive," said the Angel of Death. "I have all mankind in my power, and Elijah is no exception."

"At the creation of heaven and earth," said God, to the Angel of Death, "I told thee that thou wast to grant permission to this living prophet to enter."

"If Elijah be permitted to enter heaven alive," argued the Angel of Death, "then many others will be justified in demanding the same privilege."

Thereupon God said: "Elijah is not like other men. He is able to banish thee from the world, only thou dost not recognize his strength."

"Permit us then a trial of strength," pleaded the Angel of Death.

God gave permission, and a combat took place between Elijah and the Angel of Death. The prophet was the victor, and if God had not

restrained him, he would have banished the Angel of Death from the world. Holding his defeated enemy under his feet, Elijah entered the gate of heaven.

5. *Elijah in Heaven*

In heaven, Elijah goes on living forever. There he records the deeds of all men, and he guides the pious to their appointed places in Paradise. On Friday at the approach of the Sabbath, he brings up the souls of the sinners from Gehenna, where they suffer for their sins the rest of the week, and when the day of rest is almost over he leads them back again to the place where they have to remain until their sins are expiated. After these souls have atoned for their sins, Elijah leads them to Paradise, the place of everlasting bliss.

Elijah, even when on earth, was really an angel in human form. He had pleaded to be sent down to earth at the time God was about to create man on the sixth day of the creation. He then said to God: "Master of the world! If it be pleasing in Thine eyes, I will descend to earth, and make myself of service to the sons of men."

"I will grant thee permission to descend to earth," replied God, "when thy presence there shall be most needed."

In the days of King Ahab, when the children of Israel became corrupt and worshiped Baal, God changed the name of the angel and said: "Now I

permit thee to abide among men, so that thou mayest convert the world to the belief that I am the Lord God."

When Elijah had fulfilled his mission on earth, God took him again to heaven, and said to him: "Henceforth thou shalt be the guardian spirit of My children forever, and spread the belief in Me throughout the whole world."

In heaven Elijah resumed his name as angel, Sandalphon. Every day, as the prayers of the Israelites ascend to heaven, this angel makes wreaths for the Almighty out of the prayers.

6. *Elijah a Slave*

Elijah, although he had resumed his angel name Sandalphon, very often appears on the earth in his human form for one reason or another. He descends to earth on many occasions, especially to help the worthy poor.

Once there was a very poor man, the father of a large family. In his great distress he thus prayed to God one day: "O Lord of the world, Thou knowest, there is none to whom I can tell my great misery, for there is none who will take pity on me. I have neither brother, nor kinsman, nor friend, and my starving little ones are dying from hunger. Therefore do Thou have mercy upon me, or let death come and put an end to our misery."

As the poor man turned around after he had

made his prayer, he saw a man standing in front of him.

"Why are you weeping?" asked the stranger, who was none other than Elijah.

"My children are crying for food," replied the distressed father, "and I being poor, am not able to help them."

"Then take me and sell me as a slave," suggested the prophet, "and the money you get from the sale will suffice for your wants."

"What right have I to sell you as a slave?" protested the poor man.

"Sell me as a slave," insisted the prophet, "and I assure you that no harm will befall you."

The poor man then conducted Elijah to a prince who bought him for eighty denarii. With this money the poor man started on some business enterprise, and he and his family enjoyed comfort to the end of their days.

The prince who had purchased Elijah, said to him one day: "Tell me in what manner of work you excel."

"I am an architect," answered the new slave.

"That is very good," answered the prince, "as I intend to build a palace for myself. If you will complete this palace within six months, I will give you your freedom."

After nightfall of the same day, Elijah offered a prayer, and in the twinkling of an eye there stood a beautiful palace, all complete, in the place

selected by the prince. Elijah immediately disappeared.

The next morning the prince was greatly amazed to find a beautiful palace all completed in the very place he had selected. He then looked for his new slave to reward him and to give him his freedom, but in vain, the slave was nowhere to be found. The prince then realized that the slave was an angel of God.

In the meantime Elijah appeared again to the poor man who had sold him and after having told him the whole story, he added: "Now, do not be under the impression that I cheated the prince; the palace erected in his court is worth many times the money he paid for me." Having set the mind of the poor man at ease, the prophet vanished.

7. *Good Guardians of a Treasure*

Once there was a very rich man who had lost his fortune, and became so poor that he was forced to work in the field of another to earn bread for himself and his family. One day, while the poor man was at work, Elijah appeared to him in the guise of an Arab, and said: "You are destined to have seven good years. Do you want to have them now, or in the closing period of your life?"

"You are a wizard," said the poor man. "I have nothing for you; so leave me in peace."

Three times the same question was put to him

by the prophet, and three times the same answer was given by the poor man. At last the poor man said: "I will give you no answer before I ask the advice of my wife."

When the poor man returned to the field, Elijah came again and repeated his question. The man, following the counsel of his wife, said: "I wish the seven good years to come to us at once."

"Go home at once," replied Elijah, "and before you cross the threshold, good fortune will have come to your house."

And so it was. As the man was about to enter his house, he was met by his wife who exclaimed: "Good fortune has come to us! The children have found a treasure while digging in the ground in our yard!"

The wife of the poor man was a pious woman, and she said to her husband: "We are destined to enjoy seven years of prosperity. Let us make good use of these seven years and help the poor and the needy; perhaps God will then lengthen our period of happiness." So the man and wife used every opportunity to do good to others. They gave aid to any one who was in need.

At the end of seven years, Elijah appeared again and said to the man: "My good man, the time has come for me to take away from you what I gave you seven years ago."

"Before I accepted your gift, I first consulted my good wife," said the man. "Now, I should not

like to return it without first telling my wife of what is about to happen."

The man thereupon went home and told his wife that the old man had returned to reclaim his wealth. And his wife said: "Go and tell the old man who has come to take his property: 'If you can find any one who will take better care of the wealth entrusted to us, I will gladly give it up to you.'"

The man repeated the words of his wife to the prophet who replied: "Of a truth, you have made proper use of your wealth, and I therefore grant it to you as a perpetual possession."

8. *Three Wishes Fulfilled*

Once upon a time there was a pious man who upon his death bequeathed a spice-garden to his three good sons. The three sons took turns in guarding the garden against thieves. The first night, the eldest son was watching the garden. Elijah appeared to him and asked: "My son, which would you like to have, knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful wife?"

"I want wealth, great wealth," said the first-born son.

Elijah thereupon gave him a coin, and said: "Take this coin, and your wish will be granted."

The first-born son took the coin. In time he became a very rich man.

The next night, the second son watched in the

garden. Elijah appeared to him, too, and said: "My son, which would you like to have, knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful wife?"

"I prefer to have knowledge of the Torah," the second son replied.

Elijah thereupon gave him a book and said to him: "Take this and your wish will be granted."

The second son took the book, and he became very learned, in fact he mastered all the secrets of the Torah.

On the third night, the youngest son watched the garden. Elijah appeared to him and asked: "Which would you like to have, my son, knowledge of the Torah, great wealth, or a beautiful wife?"

"I would prefer to have a beautiful wife," replied the youngest son.

"Then come on a journey with me," said the prophet, "and you will have a beautiful wife."

The prophet and the youngest son set out on their journey. The first night, they stayed in the house of a villain, who had a beautiful daughter. During the night, Elijah overheard the chickens and the geese say to one another: "What a terrible sin this young man must have committed, that he should be destined to become the husband of the daughter of this great villain!"

The two travelers journeyed onward, and on

the following night they lodged in the house of another villain, who also had a beautiful daughter. During the night, the prophet again overheard the chickens and the geese say to one another: "What a terrible sin this young man must have committed, that he is destined to marry the daughter of this great villain!"

The two travelers continued their journey, and on the third night they lodged in the house of a man who had a very pretty daughter. During the night Elijah heard the chickens and the geese say to one another: "How great must be the virtues of this young man, if he is privileged to marry so beautiful and pious a wife!"

In the morning Elijah played the part of a matchmaker, and with the consent of the parents and the beautiful maiden, the young couple were married by Elijah. The young man then returned home with his beautiful bride.

9. *"If It Please God"*

Once there was a very wealthy man. One day he took a large sum of money with him and went to purchase oxen at a cattle sale in a nearby town. On the way, he was met by a stranger—none other than Elijah—who inquired: "Whither are you going?"

"I am going to town to buy cattle," replied the rich man.

"You should say, 'If it please God,'" urged Elijah.

"Nonsense! I shall buy cattle whether it pleases God or not," said the rich man. "I carry the money with me, and nobody can stop me from doing business."

"But not without good fortune," replied the stranger, and went off.

When the cattle-buyer arrived at the market, he discovered that he had lost his money on the road, and he had to return home to provide himself with other money. He set forth on his journey again, but this time he took a different road to avoid the stranger who had brought him ill luck. But to his surprise on this road, too, he was met by an old man who asked him: "Whither are you going?"

"I am going to town to buy oxen," replied the rich man.

"Say, 'If it please God,'" said the old man.

"Nonsense!" replied the infuriated merchant. "Who can prevent me from making my purchases, when I have money with me?"

"But not unless you have good fortune," replied the old man and went off.

When the cattle-buyer arrived at the market, he discovered that he had again lost his money, and he had to return home to provide himself with new funds. He again set out on his journey, but by this time he had learned his lesson. When he met

the stranger, and the latter asked him again: "Whither are you bound?" he answered:

"I am bound for town, and, if it please God, I intend to buy cattle there."

"And it shall be with good fortune," replied the old man, and went off again.

When the cattle-buyer reached the market place he was offered a pair of fine oxen, but their price exceeded the sum of money he had taken with him. But to his great bewilderment he found, on looking about his person, that he had recovered the two purses of money he had lost on his previous trips. Now he had enough money with which to pay for the oxen, and he returned home well pleased. Later he sold the same pair of oxen to the king at a big profit, and the rich man became even wealthier than before.

10. *The Law Prevails*

There was a pious and rich man who had a beautiful and saintly daughter. Three times this pious daughter was married and each time her husband died on the day after the marriage. She was so grieved by these unfortunate occurrences that she decided never to marry again.

The rich man had a nephew who was learned but poor. One day this youth came to his rich uncle to ask him for some help. When the young man beheld his cousin, he fell a victim to her charms, and requested his uncle to permit him to

marry her. His uncle told him of the fate that had befallen the former husbands of his daughter, and advised him to give up the idea of marrying her. But the youth was not frightened by his uncle's warning and he decided to marry the fair maiden.

While the youth was standing under the wedding canopy with his beautiful bride, Elijah came to him in the guise of an old man, and said: "My son, I wish to give you good advice. While you are seated at the wedding dinner, you will be approached by a ragged, dirty beggar, with hair like nails. As soon as you catch sight of him, hasten to seat him beside you. Set food and drink before him, and be ready to grant him whatever he may ask of you. Do as I say, and no harm will befall you. Now I shall leave you and go my way."

And sure enough, during the wedding feast, a ragged, dirty beggar, with hair like nails, came in. The bridegroom immediately made room for him to be seated next to him, and ordered food and drink to be set before him. After the wedding, the beggar disclosed his mission to the bridegroom: "I am the messenger of the Lord sent down from heaven to take your life."

The bridegroom pleaded for his life, but his pleas failed to move the Angel of Death.

"Give me at least one day longer to live," pleaded the young bridegroom.

"The decree of heaven cannot be altered," said the Angel of Death.

"Grant me at least sufficient time within which to bid farewell to my newly-wedded wife," urged the young husband.

"This request shall be granted to you," said the messenger of God.

When the bride learned that the terrible fate of her previous husbands was to befall the present bridegroom, she went over to the Angel of Death, and said: "Our holy Torah expressly says that a newly-wed is exempt from all duties for a whole year. If you take the life of my husband, you will disobey the law of God."

Thereupon a voice was heard from heaven, commanding the Angel of Death to stay his hand and spare the life of the young bridegroom.

11. *Kindness Saves from Death*

Once there was a great and a very pious scholar, Rabbi Reuben by name. The Angel of Death came to this rabbi one day, and told him that his only son would have to die.

"We, sons of man, can do nothing to oppose the will of God," said the saintly rabbi, "but I pray you, grant my son thirty days grace, so that I may see him married."

The Angel of Death acceded to the rabbi's request. But the rabbi told no one of what had taken place. He waited until the appointed time,

the thirtieth day, and then he arranged for his son's wedding feast.

On that day, the rabbi's son was met by Elijah who said: "Do you know that you are to die this day?"

The youth replied: "Who may oppose the will of God? And am I better than Abraham, Isaac and Jacob? They, too, had to give up their souls to God."

"Now, my son," said Elijah, "the Angel of Death will appear to you in the form of a ragged, dirty beggar. Receive him very kindly, and set food and drink before him, and insist that he partake of it."

When the beggar appeared at the wedding feast, the bridegroom received him very kindly, made room for him at the head of the table next to him, set food and drink before him, and insisted that the stranger eat and drink to his heart's content. At the end of the meal the stranger said: "I am a messenger of the Lord, and I have been sent down from heaven to take the life of the bridegroom." The rabbi pleaded, and the young bride wept and said: "According to the law of God, a bridegroom is exempt from all duties the first year after his marriage. If you take his life at this moment, you will give the lie to the Torah."

Moved by the supplication of the father, by the tears and the arguments of the young bride, and by the friendly treatment he had received at the

hands of the bridegroom, the Angel of Death himself went before the throne of God and presented the petition of the young wife. God thereupon said: "Let there be added seventy years to the life of the son of the worthy Reuben."

Chapter XVI

ELISHA

1. *Healing the Water at Jericho*

WHEN Elijah was taken back to heaven, the spirit of prophecy departed from the prophets who lived at that time. Elisha alone retained his prophetical powers. Indeed they were even doubled when his teacher Elijah ascended to heaven. Elijah performed only eight miracles during his stay on earth, while Elisha performed sixteen.

The people of Jericho came to Elisha and said: "Our city is a good place to live in, but the water in Jericho is unfit to drink."

"Bring me a new bottle filled with salt," ordered the prophet.

When the bottle was brought, Elisha threw the salt into the water. The people who witnessed this said to one another: "This man is certainly of unsound mind. Does he expect to cure undrinkable water with salt?" But to their great astonishment, the water did become fit to drink immediately after the salt had been thrown in.

Now there were many young men in Jericho who had earned their livelihood by fetching

wholesome water from nearby towns and selling it to the people of Jericho. When Elisha went up to Bethel, he was accosted by a number of these young men. They insulted him with the words: "Get up, you bald-head! Get up, you bald-head!"

"Why do you insult me thus?" inquired the prophet.

"Because you deprived us of our livelihood, by making the water of Jericho fit to drink," replied the youngsters.

"But you are in a very small minority," said Elisha. "The majority of the townspeople desired to have the water healed."

Thereupon Elisha cursed the lads, and suddenly two bears came out from the forest and killed some of them while the others, very much frightened, fled in haste. The lads rightly deserved the punishment they received, yet it displeased God, for the prophet had yielded to his anger. By way of punishment therefor Elisha was taken seriously ill.

2. *Elisha Helps the Widow of Obadiah*

The prophet Obadiah, one of the highest officials at the court of the sinful king Ahab, had spent his fortune to support the one hundred prophets whom he had saved from the hands of the wicked queen Jezebel. Obadiah had not only used up his own fortune for that purpose, but he had also borrowed money on interest from Jeho-

ram, who was to succeed Ahab on the throne. When Obadiah died, King Jehoram went to collect the debt from the widow of Obadiah.

"But I have nothing of value wherewith to pay this debt," pleaded the widow.

"Then," said the king, "I will take your two sons instead of money."

Thereupon the widow went to the graveyard, and there she cried out: "O thou God-fearing man!"

"There are four God-fearing men, Abraham, Joseph, Job and Obadiah," answered a heavenly voice. "To which of them dost thou desire to speak?"

"I desire to speak to him of whom it is said, 'He feared the Lord greatly,'" replied the pious widow.

She was led to the grave of the prophet Obadiah, where she related her sorrow. Then a voice from the grave answered and said: "Go to the prophet Elisha, and tell him to bring the case before God. The Lord owes me the sum I owe to King Jehoram. For did He not say: 'He that hath pity upon the poor lendeth unto the Lord'?"

The pious widow immediately went to the prophet, who said to her: "What hast thou in thy house?"

"I have nothing left but a little cruse of oil," answered the pious woman.

"Your husband provided a hundred prophets

not only with bread and water, but also with oil to illuminate the caves wherein they were hidden," said Elisha. "Go, then, and borrow vessels from all your neighbors, lock the door of your house, fill up the vessels with oil out of the small cruse, and with the proceeds from the sale of the oil you will pay your husband's debt."

The widow filled up vessel upon vessel with oil. She now had enough money to pay the king, and she had some left over for the support of herself and her sons.

3. *Elisha Revives the Son of the Shunammite*

There lived a great woman in the town of Shunem, who was very hospitable to strangers. When Elisha came to Shunem on his journey through the land of Israel, he was invited by this woman to lodge at her house and eat bread there, though the identity of the traveler was unknown to her. She observed, however, that not a fly ever dared approach close to the prophet, and she therefore knew that the visitor was a holy man.

Once the woman said to her husband: "The man who stays with us is a man of God. Let us furnish an upper chamber for him, and whenever he visits our town, he may stay with us in our upper chamber and not be disturbed." Her husband readily consented, and the woman furnished a room for the prophet who would stop there whenever he came to Shunem.

The prophet was very anxious to show his appreciation of the woman's hospitality. Once the prophet learned that the good woman was childless, and he said to himself: "Can I find any better reward for her kindness than to pray that she may be blessed with a child?" He therefore called for the woman and said to her while she stood at the entrance to his chamber: "Next year at this time you shall embrace a son." And so it came to pass. Before the year was over, the pious woman of Shunem became the mother of a beautiful boy.

A few years later the child of the good woman died suddenly. The mother took the dead child to Elisha's chamber and she laid him on the prophet's bed. She herself went to see the prophet at Mount Carmel. When the prophet heard of the sudden death of the child, he said to his disciple Gehazi: "Here take my staff and bring the boy back to life. Not a word shall you utter on the road before you place my staff on the dead boy." But the woman swore by the name of God that she would not go away unless the prophet himself went with her.

Gehazi, instead of obeying the command of his master not to speak a word on the way, made sport of the task laid upon him. To whomever he met on the road, he made the following statement: "I am the disciple of Elisha, and he has sent me to bring back to life a dead boy with his staff. Now look closely at this staff; do you really think that

it can bring the dead back to life?" The result was that Gehazi lost all the power that he had received from Elisha, and when he placed the staff on the dead child, it was of no effect at all.

Thereupon Elisha accompanied the woman, and he prayed to God: "O Lord of the world! As Thou didst perform a miracle through my master Elijah, and didst permit him to bring the dead back to life, so, I pray Thee, do Thou perform a miracle through me, and let me restore life to this lad." But the prophet's prayer remained unanswered. He then continued his prayer thus: "O Lord of the world! I pray Thee restore life to this lad for the sake of his mother who is hospitable and receives strangers with great kindness into her house." No sooner had Elisha completed this prayer than the lad opened his eyes.

4. *Gehazi Punished*

Naaman, the captain of the Syrian armies, was stricken with leprosy. The prophet Elisha cured the captain by advising him to bathe in the Jordan seven times. Naaman offered to reward the prophet, but Elisha refused to take aught from him. The prophet also ordered Gehazi to take nothing from the Syrian.

Gehazi, however, disobeyed the order of his master. He followed the Syrian captain, and when he had gone a short distance from the house of the prophet, Gehazi overtook him and said to

him: "My master has sent me to get from you a talent of silver and two suits of clothes." Gehazi received the silver and garments from the captain, and hid them away.

On Gehazi's return from Naaman, he found Elisha occupied with the study of the Mishnah dealing with the eight reptiles. The prophet Elisha raised his eyes and greeted his disciple with a bitter rebuke: "Villain! the time has come for me to receive a reward for my study of the Mishnah that deals with the eight reptiles. May my reward be that the disease of Naaman afflict you and your descendants for evermore."

Now Gehazi well deserved his punishment on account of his base character. He was envious, and endeavored to keep other disciples away from the house of Elisha. He would stand outside the prophet's door, and many disciples who were about to enter the house of Elisha their master to learn of his wisdom would go back upon seeing Gehazi stand without. For they argued: "The house of our master must be filled to overflowing, otherwise Gehazi would not remain without." Only after the dismissal of Gehazi did the number of Elisha's disciples increase greatly.

In spite of all this, God was displeased with the severity of the prophet's curse. Elisha had to endure a second period of illness. The third time sickness befell him, he died.

Chapter XVII

JONAH

1. *The Flight of Jonah*

MONG the many thousands of disciples of the prophet Elisha, the most prominent was Jonah. While his master was still alive, it was Jonah's duty once to proclaim to the inhabitants of Jerusalem that the city with its inhabitants would be destroyed on account of its wrong-doings. The inhabitants of Jerusalem repented of their evil deeds, and God had mercy upon them and did not bring upon them the punishment they deserved. Jonah was therefore known among the Israelites as "the false prophet."

One day, God appeared to Jonah and commanded him to go to the people of Nineveh, a very large heathen city, and to warn them that they would be destroyed if they failed to mend their evil ways. Jonah thereupon reflected: "I know that the heathens will repent, and the punishment will not be executed. Then I shall gain the reputation of being a false prophet even among the heathens. I will therefore escape to a land where there will be no need for me to prophesy."

Thereupon Jonah went to Joppa, a seaport, to embark on a seagoing vessel, but there was no vessel in port. Jonah was informed that a ship had left only a few days before, and that there would be no other vessel leaving port for a long time. To try him, God caused a storm to arise, and the vessel that had left Joppa two days previously was forced to go back to the harbor. The prophet took this as a good omen, and was so overjoyed by the opportunity to leave that he paid the captain of the vessel four thousand gold denarii for his passage.

After a day's sailing from shore, a terrific storm broke loose. The passengers looked about and were not a little surprised to see that other vessels were not in the least affected by the storm. They then said to one another: "Let us get together and find ways and means to appease the enraged elements."

Now on this vessel were representatives of the seventy nations of the earth, each one believing in his own god. They all decided to pray to their gods for help, and to recognize the god from whom help would come and worship him as the one true god. They prayed and prayed, but help came from none, and the storm did not in the least abate.

Throughout all this tumult, Jonah was lying fast asleep in a corner of the vessel. The captain of the ship noticed him, woke him and said: "We

are suspended between life and death, and you lie here asleep. Pray, tell us to what nation you belong."

"I am a Hebrew," replied Jonah.

"We have been told," said the captain, "that the God of the Hebrews is the most powerful. Cry to him for help. Perhaps He will perform such miracles for us as in the days of old at the Red Sea."

"I am to blame for this misfortune," confessed Jonah. "I know that the storm will not abate unless you throw me into the waters of the sea."

The other passengers refused to throw Jonah into the raging sea. They decided to draw lots to ascertain who was really the cause of the whole misfortune. The lot fell upon Jonah, and yet the passengers refused to throw him overboard. "Let us first lighten the load of the vessel, and then we shall determine what to do next." They threw their cargo overboard, but their efforts were in vain; the vessel could neither go forward nor return to the harbor.

"I told you," said Jonah, "that the storm would not abate unless you throw me overboard."

Even then the passengers of the vessel could not make up their minds to let Jonah drown. They immersed him up to his knees in the water of the sea, and the storm ceased. The captain and the passengers were overjoyed. They drew Jonah back into the vessel, but to their disappointment

the storm immediately broke out again. They lowered him into the water of the sea up to his navel, and once more the storm subsided. Again they raised him out of the water, and again the storm raged anew, even fiercer than before. They lowered him a third time into the water, this time to his neck, and the storm abated. A third time they pulled him up, and the storm broke out with redoubled fury. They finally decided to abandon Jonah to his fate. They threw him overboard, and in an instant the raging sea became calm.

2. *Jonah in the Whale*

God summoned a big whale, which He had made at the creation of the world for this very purpose, and ordered him to swallow Jonah, but to do him no harm. The creature was so large that the prophet was quite comfortable inside of him. The eyes of the whale served Jonah as windows through which he could see everything in the sea down to its very bottom. Inside the whale, were diamonds which shone as brilliantly as the noonday sun.

Now it is a law that all the inhabitants of the sea must, when their respective turns come, go to Leviathan, and let the monster devour them. Jonah's whale was about to give up his life to Leviathan, and he said to Jonah: "Both you and I will now have to suffer death."

"Why, what has happened?" asked Jonah.

"The day has come when I must go to Leviathan and permit him to swallow me," answered the whale.

"I will save you from death," said the prophet.

When the whale, with Jonah in his belly, came to Leviathan, the prophet said to the ruler of the seas: "I have come here to see your abode. For it is my appointed task to capture you in the future life and to slaughter you for the table of the just and the pious."

The monster was so terrified at the words of the prophet that he fled from the spot for a distance of two days' travel. Thus were Jonah and the whale saved from death.

Thereupon Jonah said to the whale: "I have saved you from certain death, now I would like you to show me some of the sights of the deep."

The whale consented and carried the prophet wherever there was a marvelous sight to see. He showed him the river from which the ocean flows. Then he carried him to the Red Sea and showed him the still existing paths made by the Israelites when they crossed the sea on dry ground. He showed him the spot where the sons of Korah, who had rebelled against Moses, pray for the atonement of their father's sin, and he showed him Gehenna, and many other mysterious and wonderful places.

3. *Jonah Prays to God*

For three days, Jonah remained in the belly of the whale, but he still felt so comfortable that he did not think of praying to God to save him. God thereupon sent a female fish that was carrying three hundred and sixty-five thousand young ones in its belly to demand the surrender of Jonah. The female fish said to the whale: "You must give up the prophet, else I will swallow you and your guest."

"How can you prove to me that your words are true?" asked the whale.

The female fish brought the whale to Leviathan who said: "I myself have heard God order the female fish to take Jonah away from the whale."

When Jonah was transferred into the belly of the female fish, he felt very uncomfortable, for there were too many little fishes that shared his new quarters with him. He then prayed very fervently that God deliver him from his misery, and he promised to go on the mission on which God had sent him. Thereupon God ordered the fish to spew Jonah forth. Jonah alighted on dry land at a distance of nine hundred and sixty-five parasangs from the spot where the fish was when she spewed Jonah forth.

Jonah went to Nineveh, a monstrous city, and proclaimed that the inhabitants would be destroyed because of their evil deeds. Thereupon King

Osnappar issued a royal decree that all people of the city of Nineveh turn aside from their ungodly ways. The king himself descended from his throne, removed his crown, and strewed ashes on his head. He then published a royal edict that all the inhabitants of Nineveh fast for three days, and that they pray to God not to bring upon them the threatened punishment.

The Ninevites fasted and prayed for three days, and even the infants and babes were refused food during the days of fasting. The people also determined to lead a better life in the future, and not only did they stop robbing one another, but they also restored the stolen property they had. The people of Nineveh raised their infants toward heaven, and with tears of sorrow they cried: "For the sake of these innocent babes, hear our prayer and save us!"

A peculiar incident happened during these days of repentance. A man came to the judges of the city and said to them: "Many, many years ago, an ancestor of mine bought a very dilapidated house from his neighbor, and found a treasure there which made him a very rich man. This treasure has passed from father to son until now it has reached me. Now, I would like to return it to the rightful owner." The judges examined the deed the man produced, and they discovered that thirty-five generations had passed since the time the sale took place. The judges traced the descendants of

the original seller of the house, and returned the treasure to one of the heirs who was alive in Nineveh.

When God saw that the people of Nineveh had really repented of their evil deeds, He took pity on them and pardoned them. Thereupon Jonah also took courage and spoke to God thus: "Pray, O Lord, have mercy on me and forgive me for my flight."

"Thou fleddest because thou wast mindful of Mine honor; thou didst not want to appear a liar, lest men's trust in God be shaken thereby," said God to the prophet. "Therefore was I merciful to thee and rescued thee from the belly of the whale."

While Jonah was in the belly of the fish, the intense heat there had consumed his garments, and had made his hair fall out. When Jonah finished praying to God, he was annoyed by a swarm of insects that gathered on his bare body and bald head. God thereupon caused a gourd to grow over night so as to afford Jonah protection from the insects and the hot rays of the sun. In the morning, when the prophet woke up, he saw a tree with two hundred and seventy-five leaves, each leaf measuring no less than a span. Jonah was grateful to God for having afforded him protection from the insects and from the heat of the sun.

After a while, the gourd withered, and the

prophet was again annoyed by the insects. The prophet wept, and wished that death might come and relieve him of his suffering.

"Why weepest thou?" asked God.

"O Lord of the world! I weep for the tree that has withered," replied the prophet.

"Then thou weepest for a plant and thou art sorry it was destroyed, although thou hast not planted it nor didst thou labor for it," said God. "Yet thou didst desire Me to have no pity on the great city of Ninevah and to destroy all its inhabitants, merely because thou didst not wish to be called a liar."

Jonah thereupon prostrated himself and said: "O God, guide the world according to Thy goodness."

Chapter XVIII

FROM JOASH TO JEHOIACHIN

1. *The Blood of the Prophet Zechariah*

THE sword of Athaliah had slain all the descendants of King David except one. The high priest Jehoiadah and his wife Jehosheba saved the life of one child of the house of David, whose name was Joash. The child was kept in hiding in the Holy of Holies for several years, and later Jehoiadah restored the crown to Joash.

As long as the high priest was alive, Joash was a pious king. But when Jehoiadah died, the attendants of the king came to him and said: "Our king and lord! you were hidden for six years in the Holy of Holies. If you were not a god, you would not have been able to stay there for such a long time. For even the high priest is not permitted to enter there except once a year."

The king listened to his attendants and allowed them to worship him and pay him divine homage. He was about to place an idol in the Temple, and he chose the Day of Atonement, which happened to fall on a Saturday, as the most suitable day for

that purpose. The prophet, Zechariah, the son of Jehoiadah and the son-in-law of Joash, said to himself: "Surely the people will do no harm to me on this holy day if I rebuke the king for his evil intent." He consequently placed himself at the entrance of the Temple and said to the king: "You shall not do this thing so long as I live."

The king disregarded the fact that it was the Day of Atonement, and that Zechariah was his son-in-law, and gave orders that the priest and prophet be killed immediately for his audacious words. The innocent blood of Zechariah did not remain unavenged. For two hundred and fifty-two years, the floor in the Hall of the Priests remained stained with the blood of the prophet, and it did not stop seething until Nebuzaradan, commander-in-chief of Nebuchadnezzar's forces, came at the head of a big army to destroy the Temple.

2. *The Prophet Isaiah*

When Uzziah become King of Judah, he was not satisfied with his high position, but tried to take to himself the office of priest and to sacrifice offerings upon the altar. The high priest Azariah protested against the act of the king, and endeavored to restrain him from sacrificing offerings to God, but the king threatened to kill the high priest as well as any one else who would dare to interfere with him.

Suddenly the earth quaked and a great breach was formed in the roof of the Temple. A brilliant ray of light pierced through the breach, which fell upon the forehead of the sinful king and caused leprous sores to break out.

On that very day Isaiah received his first communication from God. Isaiah was favored to behold the throne of God and to hear the hymns of praise sung by the angels: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts: the whole earth is full of His glory." In his great astonishment and admiration, the prophet failed to join his voice with those of the angels. Then the prophet cried out: "Woe is me that I was silent! Woe is me that I failed to join the chorus of the angels praising God! Had I joined them, I, too, would have become immortal like the angels." But then he thought: "No man like me, of unclean lips and dwelling in the midst of a people of unclean lips, may have everlasting life and escape the hand of death."

"Who gave thee the right to insult My people, and to call them 'a people of unclean lips'?" resounded the voice of God in rebuke.

"But I have called myself, too, 'a man of unclean lips,' " the prophet said.

"Of thyself thou art the master, and of thyself thou mayest say what thou choosest," said God. "But who gave thee the right to speak thus of My people?"

Isaiah thereupon heard God say to an angel:

"Touch his lips with a live coal for having slandered Israel." Though the coal was so hot that the angel needed very long tongs to take it from the altar, yet the prophet was unscathed when the coal touched him.

Thus Isaiah learned that it was his duty to defend Israel and not to slander him. He said: "Would that I were granted the gift of eloquence, so that I might defend and comfort Israel all the time!" It was as a reward for this good intention that Isaiah received more Divine revelations concerning Israel and other nations than any other prophet before or after him.

3. *Hezekiah*

Hezekiah, upon ascending the throne of Judah, issued this royal decree: "Whoever does not engage in the study of the Torah, will be punished with death." Everybody took to the study of the Law of Moses, and as a result one could search the land from Dan even to Beer-sheba and not find a single ignorant man. In reward for Hezekiah's piety God wrought a miracle for him whereby he won a great victory over Sennacherib.

Sennacherib, king of Assyria, who had conquered the whole world, now equipped a very large army to wage war against Hezekiah. His army consisted of more than two and a half million horsemen, among whom were forty-five thousand princes riding in chariots of gold; eighty

thousand armor-clad soldiers, and sixty thousand swordsmen. The army was divided into three divisions. The first division crossed the Jordan on the backs of their horses, which swam across the river. After the first host had crossed, the water was so much diminished that the second division could wade through the river on horseback. And when the second host had crossed the river, the water of the Jordan was entirely dried up, and the horses of the third division kicked up great clouds of dust.

Now the king of Assyria had been warned by the astrologers that he would fail in his campaign against Jerusalem, if he arrived there later than the day set by them. He therefore hastened onward with his vast army, completing his journey in a single day, and he rested at Nob. There a raised platform was erected for the king from which he could view the city of Jerusalem. On first beholding the Judæan capital, the Syrian king exclaimed: "What! Is this Jerusalem, the city for whose sake I gathered together my whole army, and for whose sake I first conquered all other lands? Is it not smaller and weaker than all the cities of the nations I have subdued with my strong hand?"

"Our great lord and mighty king! let us make the attack upon the city now," urged his warriors.

The king stretched himself and shook his head, and, waving his hand with great contempt toward

the Temple mound and the sanctuary, he said to his warriors: "It is no great undertaking. Take your ease for one night, and be prepared to storm the city to-morrow. Each warrior would only have to pick up one brick from the wall of Jerusalem for the entire city wall to disappear."

4. *The End of a Traitor*

In the city of Jerusalem, there were many who favored the idea of making peace with the Assyrian king. At the head of this party were two influential men, the high priest Shebnab and Joah. These two men had a bigger following in the city than even the king himself.

Shebnab wished to communicate with Sennacherib, and he therefore fastened a letter to a dart, and shot the dart into the Assyrian camp. The letter was brought to the Assyrian king who read its contents: "We and the whole people of Israel wish to conclude peace with you, but King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah will not permit it."

The influence of Shebnab was very powerful among the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the king began to show signs of wavering. But the prophet Isaiah said to him: "Thus sayeth the Lord, 'Fear not this conspiracy'." Encouraged by the word of the prophet, the king decided not to submit to the demands of the Assyrian king.

Shebnab thereupon proclaimed to the men who followed him: "Come, let us leave the city and

make peace with Sennacherib, king of Assyria." The rebel leader, followed by many thousands of the people of Jerusalem, started to leave Jerusalem in order to join the Assyrians. But as soon as Shebnab passed beyond the gates of the city, the angel Gabriel closed the gates behind the rebel, and so Shebnab was separated from his followers.

Shebnab was brought before the Assyrian king who asked: "Are you Shebnab, the author of this letter?"

"It is your servant, my great lord and mighty king," answered Shebnab.

"Where are then the great numbers of your followers that you have spoken of in your letter?" asked the king.

"O my lord and king! they have changed their mind, and would not come out of the city to make peace with you," replied Shebnab.

"You have written nothing but lies, you have made sport of me," said the infuriated king.

Thereupon King Sennacherib ordered his attendants to bore holes through the heels of Shebnab, to tie him to the tail of a horse by his heels, and to spur the horse on until Shebnab was dragged to death. Such was the end of Shebnab the traitor.

5. *The Miraculous Defeat of Sennacherib*

That night, which was Passover night, while King Hezekiah and the people were chanting

Psalms, God said to the archangel Gabriel: "Descend to earth, and save My people from the hands of the boastful Sennacherib." Gabriel descended at once, and permitted the Assyrian hosts to hear the singing of the angels in heaven. They could not bear the sweet heavenly melodies, and their souls were burned, though their bodies remained intact. The whole Assyrian host perished with the exception of King Sennacherib, his two sons, his son-in-law Nebuchadnezzar, and General Nebuzaradan.

In the morning, when Sennacherib awoke from his sleep, he discovered the great calamity which had befallen his mighty warriors and he and the other survivors fled from the camp. On his flight he met an angel in the form of an old man, who said to him: "What will you say to the kings allied with you, when they make inquiry of you as to the fate of their sons at Jerusalem?"

"I admit that I dread to meet those kings," answered the fleeing king.

"I would advise you then," said the old man, "that you cut off your hair, and thus change your appearance so that they would not be able to recognize you."

"This is certainly good advice," said the king, "but where can we get a pair of shears to cut my hair with?"

"There is a house yonder," said the angel, "go there and fetch a pair of shears."

When the Assyrian king arrived in the house, he found some people, who really were angels in disguise, busily engaged in grinding grain with a hand-mill.

"Will you please let me have a pair of shears?" asked the king.

"Yes, we will let you have a pair of shears," answered the people, "provided you grind a measure of grain for us."

King Sennacherib ground the measure of grain given him by the angels, and as reward for his work he received a pair of shears. It was dark when Sennacherib reached the old man again. "Now you will have to procure a light," the old man said, "before your hair can be cut." The king thereupon started a fire with dry sticks that he gathered, and, as he fanned the flame, a spark flew into his beard and singed it. Then the angel gave him a hair-cut, and the Assyrian king continued his journey homeward.

Now, Sennacherib was wont to pray to a plank which he worshiped as an idol, because it was part of the ark which had saved Noah from the flood. When the survivors returned to Assyria, Sennacherib made a vow before the plank saying: "If I prosper in my next ventures, I will sacrifice my sons to thee." But his sons overheard him, and they killed their father as he was worshiping the idol.

6. *The Life of King Hezekiah Prolonged*

King Hezekiah had become ill, and God told the prophet Isaiah to pay a visit to the ailing king. When the prophet appeared before the sick king, he said: "Set your house in order, for you will die in this world, and you will not live in the world to come."

"Why have I forfeited my share in the world to come?" asked the pious king.

"It is because you have refused to take to yourself a wife, and bring forth posterity," replied the prophet.

"But the reason I abstained from marriage was because I knew that I was destined to have impious children," said the king in his defense.

"Why do you concern yourself with the secrets of the All-Merciful?" protested the prophet. "You have but to do your duty. God will do whatsoever it pleases Him."

King Hezekiah thereupon said to the prophet: "Would you consent to give me your daughter in marriage? Perhaps my merits joined to yours will cause my children to be God-fearing."

"Why talk about marriage?" asked the prophet. "You are doomed to die, for the decree of God ordering your death cannot be altered."

"Why do you discourage me thus?" said the king angrily. "It has been handed down to me

from my ancestors: 'Even when a sharp sword rests at the very throat of a man, he must not refrain from uttering a prayer for mercy.' And you tell me that there is no more hope for me, even if I repent."

"Well, then, if you recover from your present illness, I will give you my daughter in marriage," promised the prophet.

As soon as Isaiah left the house of the king of Judah, the ailing king turned his face toward the wall, and fervently prayed to God: "O Lord, Master of the world! Cure me from my present sickness for the sake of my ancestors David and Solomon, and also for my own sake, for I have served Thee with a true heart and have fulfilled all Thy commandments."

The prophet Isaiah immediately returned to the king and said to him: "Thus sayeth the Lord, 'I add fifteen years to thy life; but I do it only not for thine own sake, but for the sake of thine ancestor David.' In token of the truth of my prophecy, the sun will this day shine ten hours longer than it generally does."

The sun did shine on that day ten additional hours, and King Hezekiah recovered from his illness. The remotest lands noticed the great miracle, and were amazed.

There ruled in Babylon at that time a king whose name was Baladan. The face of this king had been changed into that of a dog, and his son

had to administer the affairs of state, and therefore this son was mostly known by the name of his father, Baladan. This Baladan was in the habit of dining at noon, and of taking a nap until three o'clock in the afternoon.

On the day of Hezekiah's recovery, he awoke from his sleep and saw the sun overhead. "My guards have made sport of me," thought the enraged king, "for they have let me sleep the whole afternoon and through the night." He thereupon summoned all his guards, and he said to them: "You shall all be put to death, for you permitted me to sleep the whole afternoon and the night following it."

"O lord, pray listen to what has happened. The God of the Jews made the sun stand still for ten hours, as a sign to King Hezekiah that he would recover from his illness and that fifteen years would be added to his life."

"Another mockery," exclaimed the enraged king. But when Baladan was convinced that it was all true, he said: "Until now, I have worshiped the sun, for I thought that it was the mightiest of all gods, but now I see that the God of the Jews is still mightier, for He has control over the sun."

The king of Babylon at once prepared to send greetings to the king of the Jews. His letter read as follows: "Peace be with Hezekiah, peace be with his great God, and peace be with Jerusalem."

As soon as the letter was sent, it occurred to King Baladan that the letter was not composed properly. "The name of God," he argued, "should have been mentioned before the name of King Hezekiah." He hastily descended from his throne, took three steps and called back the messengers. He ordered another letter to be written which read: "Peace be with the great God of the Jews, peace be with Hezekiah, and peace be with Jerusalem." God was pleased with the act of Baladan, and He said: "Because Baladan descended from his throne and took three steps to do Me honor, three of his descendants shall be known from one end of the world to the other." And these three descendants were, Nebuchadnezzar, Evil-merodach, and Belshazzar.

When the messengers of the king of Babylon reached the palace of King Hezekiah, they were brought before the king, who read the message with great pride. He was so overjoyed with the greetings that he ate together with the heathens at his table. He also led the heathens to the Temple, showed them all the treasures of the king and of the Temple, and, opening the Holy Ark, he pointed to the tablets of the law within it and said: "With the help of these we undertake wars and win victories."

God thereupon sent the prophet Isaiah to Hezekiah to say to him: "Because thou wert proud of

thyself and didst show the heathens all thy treasures and the treasures of the Temple, all this shall one day be carried away into Babylon."

7. *Manasseh*

Hezekiah took to himself as wife the daughter of the prophet Isaiah, who bore him two sons, Rabshakeh and Manasseh. Hezekiah taught them to walk in the ways of God and His holy Torah, and he was in the habit of taking them daily to a school where the Torah was taught to them.

One day, while the king carried his two sons on his shoulders to school, he overheard their conversation. Rabshakeh said to Manasseh: "Our father's head might do for frying fish." Manasseh rejoined: "Our father's head would do well for offering sacrifices to the idols." King Hezekiah was enraged by these words, and he violently dropped the two children from his shoulders. This fall caused the death of Rabshakeh, but Manasseh remained unhurt.

After the death of the pious Hezekiah, Manasseh ruled over Judah. He did not walk in the ways of his father, and filled the land with idolatry and murder. The altar was destroyed, and in the inner space of the Temple he set up an idol with four heads. The prophet Isaiah and the other prophets Micah, Joel, and Habakkuk left Jerusalem and lived in a mountain in the desert, that

they might be spared the sight of the terrible crimes committed by the wicked and godless Manasseh, who was Isaiah's own grandson.

A certain Samaritan tracked the prophets down to their place of retreat, and disclosed it to the wicked Manasseh. The king thereupon sent for the prophet Isaiah, and said to him: "You are a false prophet, and therefore you must die. Moses said in the name of God, 'For man shall not see My face and live,' while you said, 'I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up.' You have contradicted Moses, and therefore you deserve death."

Isaiah knew that there was no use of defending himself, since the wicked king was determined to kill him. He therefore sought safety in flight, and when he saw the bailiffs of the king pursuing him, he pronounced the Name of God, whereupon he was swallowed up by a cedar. The king ordered that the tree be sawn in pieces. When the saw was applied to the portion of the bark under which the mouth of Isaiah was concealed, the prophet died. Isaiah's mouth was the only vulnerable spot of his body, because he called the people of Israel "a people of unclean lips." Isaiah died at the age of one hundred and twenty years, by the hands of his own grandchild.

Manasseh received punishment for his wickedness during his lifetime. In the twenty-second year of his reign, the Assyrians came and carried

him off to Babylon in fetters. In Babylonia, Manasseh was put into a kettle full of holes, the kettle was then put on a hot oven. In his great suffering Manasseh called upon the many gods he had served to come to his rescue. "Come ye gods and save me now from this scorching fire that consumes my body," exclaimed the king as the agony of his suffering grew more intense. As there was no help coming from these gods, he said: "I remember a verse my father Hezekiah had taught me: 'When thou art in tribulation, if in the latter days thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and hearken unto His voice, He will not fail thee.' Now I will cry unto Him. If He will answer me in time of distress, then I shall know that there is no other god besides Him. If my prayer to Him remains unanswered, then shall I know that all gods are alike."

Manasseh thereupon wept bitterly and prayed to God with all his heart. The angels, seeing that the prayers of the wicked king were about to reach heaven, stopped up the windows of heaven, so that the prayers of Manasseh might not ascend to God. The angels then came before the throne of Divine Majesty and said: "Lord of the world! Art Thou willing to listen to the prayer of the one who was the most wicked of all the kings and who has set up an idol in Thy Temple?"

God replied: "Although ye have stopped all the gates of heaven, yet one still remains open, and

this is the gate of tears. This gate always remains open, and no angel may interfere with it. Now I behold the tears of the repentant king and I will accept his prayer, so that the sons of man may not say that I close the door to all repentant sinners."

God made a small opening under the throne of Divine Majesty and received Manasseh's prayer through it. Suddenly a strong wind arose, and carried Manasseh back to Jerusalem. Thereupon Manasseh exclaimed: "The Lord, He is God."

8. *"This and Something Besides"*

Jehoiakim was another sinful king of Judah. He tattooed the names of idols upon his body, disobeyed all the laws of God, and was very unkind to men. He boasted: "My predecessors did not know how to provoke the wrath of God. As for me, I say frankly that we have no need whatsoever of Him. We have no need even of the very lights He gives us, for they can be well replaced by the gold of Parvaim."

After Jehoiakim had reigned for eleven years, Nebuchadnezzar put an end to his dominion over Judah. The Babylonian king advanced with a big army and halted at Daphne, a suburb of Antioch. Here he was met by the Sanhedrin of Jerusalem, who said to him: "Have you really come with the intention of destroying our holy Temple?"

"No," replied Nebuchadnezzar, "I have come

The king was let down from the city walls of Jerusalem

to demand the surrender of Jehoiakim, who has rebelled against me."

Returning to Jerusalem, the Sanhedrin said to Jehoiakim: "The king of Babylon has come here merely to demand your surrender because you have rebelled against him. Now it is our intention to give you up into his hands so that the city of Jerusalem, the people and the Temple may be saved from certain destruction."

"But is it right and fair that you save your lives by sacrificing mine?" asked the king.

The Sanhedrin answered: "Did not the city of Abel save itself from certain destruction at the hands of Joab, by surrendering the rebel Sheba, the son of Bichri?"

The Sanhedrin thereupon made Jehoiakim slide down on a chair from the city walls of Jerusalem, while the Babylonians stood below ready to receive him. Nebuchadnezzar placed the rebellious Jehoiakim in the body of a wooden ass, and, having bound his hands and feet in iron fetters, took him throughout all the cities of Judah. Then he put him to the sword, and threw his corpse to the dogs. The dogs left nothing of Jehoiakim's body, except his skull, on which were written the words: "This and something besides."

9. *A Fiery Hand from Heaven*

When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylonia from his Palestinian expedition, he was received

with great pomp and solemnity. He then announced to his advisers that he had killed the rebellious Jehoiakim and he had installed the rebel's son Jehoiachin as king over Judah. Thereupon his councillors said to him: "One cannot educate a well-behaved puppy whose dam was ill-conditioned; let alone an ill-conditioned puppy whose dam was ill-conditioned."

Nebuchadnezzar returned to Daphne, and here he was again met by the Sanhedrin who once more inquired: "Have you come with the intention of destroying our holy Temple?"

"I have come not with the intention of destroying the Temple," replied the Babylonian king, "but I desire the surrender of Jehoiachin. Should you refuse to surrender him, I will destroy your Temple."

The Sanhedrin then came to Jehoiachin and said: "Nebuchadnezzar desires that you surrender yourself to him, otherwise he threatens to destroy the Temple."

"For my sake," said the king, "I am not going to expose to peril the Temple and the city of Jerusalem. I shall surrender myself to the Babylonian king on condition that he do no harm to anybody else."

Jehoiachin thereupon mounted upon the roof of the Temple, and, holding all the keys of its chambers in his hand, he spoke thus to God: "Until now Thou didst consider us worthy of con-

fidence, and Thou didst entrust Thy keys to us. Since Thou dost no longer consider us trustworthy, here, take back Thy keys." As soon as Jehoiachin was done speaking, a fiery hand was stretched forth from heaven, and it received the keys of the Temple.

Nebuchadnezzar did not keep his promise, and, in addition to the king of Judah, he led into captivity the king's mother, and ten thousand of the nobles and the great scholars of the land.

Chapter XIX

THE CAPTURE OF JERUSALEM

1. *Eating a Living Hare*

AFTER Nebuchadnezzar had led Jehoiachin and a portion of the people into captivity, he inquired if there were any sons of king Josiah still living. The reply was given him that only Mattaniah was left. The Babylonian king thereupon invested Mattaniah with the royal office, and re-named him Zedekiah.

"Now swear fealty unto me," said Nebuchadnezzar to Zedekiah, "and that you will not rebel against me."

"I will swear fealty to you by my own soul," replied Zedekiah.

"Nay, that would not satisfy me," said the Babylonian king. "I desire that you swear fealty to me by a scroll of the Law."

Zedekiah then swore fealty to Nebuchadnezzar by a scroll of the Law. The king of Judah found favor in the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar and he ordered his bodyguard to admit his vassal whenever he sought entrance to his court.

One day Zedekiah visited Nebuchadnezzar, and found him in the act of cutting a piece from a living hare and eating it, as was the custom among the barbarians. Nebuchadnezzar was painfully embarrassed, and said to the Jewish king: "Now swear to me by the Holy of Holies that you will never mention what you have seen me do."

Zedekiah swore to the Babylonian king that he would not disclose to anybody what he had seen. Thereafter the Babylonian king treated Zedekiah with great friendliness, and even made him lord over five vassal kings.

2. *Nebuchadnezzar's Auguries*

The five vassal kings one day came to Zedekiah and complained of Nebuchadnezzar's cruelty, adding: "If all were as it should be, you would occupy the throne of Nebuchadnezzar." Zedekiah then exclaimed: "O yes, that cruel Nebuchadnezzar, I once saw him eating a live hare!"

The five kings at once went to Babylonia, and reported to the king what Zedekiah had said. Nebuchadnezzar flew into a rage and thereupon determined to destroy Jerusalem and lead the inhabitants into captivity.

However, Nebuchadnezzar knew that to capture the Holy City was no easy task. He well remembered how his father-in-law Sennacherib, king of Assyria, together with his vast army met with ill-fate before the walls of Jerusalem. He

well remembered how he and only four others escaped with their lives from the great catastrophe which befell them near the walls of the Holy City. These memories inspired the Babylonian king with fear and awe.

For eighteen years Nebuchadnezzar heard daily a heavenly voice resound in his palace: "O thou wicked slave, go and destroy the house of the Lord, for His children hearken not unto Him." But Nebuchadnezzar feared to undertake the task. He then resorted to witchcraft and secret arts. He took an arrow, shot it in the direction of Rome, and said: "Let this spell the doom of Rome." But the arrow returned to him. He then shot an arrow in the direction of Alexandria, and said: "Let this spell the doom of Alexandria;" but again the arrow came back. He then shot an arrow toward Jerusalem, and he said: "Let this spell the doom of Jerusalem," and the arrow went off directly toward the Holy City.

The Babylonian king then planted some seeds and set up some plants, and said: "Let these signify the defeat of Rome and Alexandria at my hands," but the seeds did not sprout nor did the plants flourish. He again planted seeds and set up plants, and he said: "Let these signify the defeat of Jerusalem at my hands," and no sooner had he uttered these words than the seeds sprouted and the plants began to grow.

Nebuchadnezzar finally lighted candles and

lanterns, and he said: "Let these lights be symbolic of my victories over Rome and Alexandria," but the candles and lanterns refused to burn. He then lighted the same candles and lanterns, and said: "Let these lights be symbolic of my victories over Jerusalem," and sure enough the lights shone brilliantly.

Even with all these signs, the Babylonian king dared not lead his army against the Holy City in person. He entrusted the command of the army to his general Nebuzaradan, who laid siege against Jerusalem for three years.

3. *The Prophet Jeremiah*

When Jeremiah was a lad, he received the call from God to be a prophet in Israel. Jeremiah refused to accept the mission, pleading: "O Lord, I cannot go as a prophet to Israel, for there has never lived a prophet among them whom they have not desired to kill. They sought to stone Moses and Aaron; they mocked at Elijah, the Tishbite, because his hair was grown long; and they called after Elisha, 'Go up, thou bald-head.' How then can I go and prophesy in Israel, when I am nought but a lad?"

"I love youth, for it is innocent," replied God. "When I brought Israel out from the land of Egypt, I called him a lad, and when I think of Israel lovingly, I speak of him as a lad. Say not, therefore, thou art only a lad, but go on whatso-

ever errand I send thee. Now, then, take the 'cup of wrath,' and let the nations drink from it."

"Which land is to drink first from this cup?" asked Jeremiah.

"The head of all earthly nations, Jerusalem, is to drink first," replied God, "then the other cities of Judah."

"Cursed be the day of my birth!" exclaimed the youthful prophet. "O Mother Zion, when I was called to prophesy, I thought that I was appointed to proclaim prosperity and salvation for thee, but now I see that my message is to forebode thy doom."

Jeremiah first appeared in public to prophesy during the reign of Josiah, when he announced to the people in the streets: "If ye will give up your wicked acts, God will raise you above all the nations; if not, He will deliver His house into the hands of the enemies, and they will deal with it as seemeth best to them."

During the reign of Zedekiah, the prophet was hated by both the people and the court. The people and the court favored an alliance with Egypt against Nebuchadnezzar, the Babylonian king, and Jeremiah favored peace with Nebuchadnezzar.

Hananiah, one of the false prophets attached to the court of King Zedekiah, was an enemy of Jeremiah, and he prophesied that the children of Israel would have a complete victory over the

Babylonian king within two years. Jeremiah prophesied just the reverse, that the Babylonian king would be victorious, and that the Jewish state would suffer total destruction, unless the Jews repented of their evil ways.

"Give us a sign that you are prophesying the truth," demanded Hananiah.

"Why trouble yourself about the future in store for others," said Jeremiah; "think rather of your own future, for this very year you shall die."

Hananiah died on the very last day of the year, but before his death he said to his son Shelemiah: "My son, when I die, my death is to be kept secret for two days, so that we may give the lie to the prophecy of Jeremiah. I charge you to seek every possible opportunity of taking revenge upon Jeremiah for it is because of his curse that I suffer death."

Shelemiah had no opportunity during his lifetime to fulfill his father's last request. And when he lay upon his deathbed, he said to his son Jeriah: "My son, remember the last wish of your grandfather and mine, to seek every occasion of taking revenge upon the prophet Jeremiah."

One day, during the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, Jeremiah wished to leave the city in order to go to Anathoth, his native place, and partake of the priestly portion there. The watchman at the gate, who was none other than Jeriah, the grandson of the false prophet Hananiah, accused

Jeremiah of desiring to betray the Judaeans to the enemy. Jeriah hastened to the court, and there brought charges of treason against the prophet. The aristocratic enemies of Jeremiah welcomed this trumped-up charge, and put Jeremiah behind prison bars. They put him in the charge of a jailer named Jonathan, who had been a friend of the false prophet Hananiah. Jonathan took delight in mocking the prisoner daily with the remark: "See, what honor your friend bestows upon you, to put you in so fine a prison as this; verily, it is a royal palace."

Once King Zedekiah visited Jeremiah in prison and inquired: "Do you have any revelation from God concerning me?"

"Yes," replied the prophet, "the king of Babylonia will carry you off into captivity. Now," continued the prophet, "even wicked men, like Hananiah and his descendants, look for a pretext when they desire to take vengeance. You who are called Zedekiah, 'just man,' should at least follow their example, and not put me in prison for no cause whatsoever."

King Zedekiah, moved by the petition of the prophet, ordered him to be released from prison, but the prophet did not enjoy his liberty for long. Jeremiah again advised the people to surrender to the Babylonian king. The nobility seized him and cast him into a lime-pit filled with water. They hoped that the prophet would drown there,

but God commanded the water in the lime-pit, saying: "Sink thou to the bottom of the pit, and let the mud at the bottom rise to the top so that it may support my faithful Jeremiah." Immediately the water sank to the bottom and the mud rose to the surface, and supported the prophet above the water.

While Jeremiah was in the pit, Jonathan, the former jailer of Jeremiah, availed himself of the opportunity to mock the prophet. He would come daily to the edge of the lime-pit and call down jeeringly: "O you true prophet of God, do but rest your head a little on the mud, and take a little sleep." Jeremiah would remain silent and would make no reply to such sneers.

In the court of King Zedekiah there was but one pious man, whose name was Ebed-Melech. He appeared before the king and said: "O Sire, if Jeremiah perishes in the lime-pit, Jerusalem will surely be captured by the enemy, for it is on account of his great merits that Jerusalem had been saved until now."

"You have my permission to save the prophet," said the king.

Ebed-Melech hastened to the pit, and cried out aloud several times, "O my lord Jeremiah," but no answer came from the pit. The prophet thought that it was his former jailer Jonathan, and therefore made no reply to the call of Ebed-Melech.

"Woe to me!" cried out Ebed-Melech, "the

prophet is dead! He must have perished in the lime-pit."

Jeremiah, realizing that it was a friend, and not Jonathan, asked: "Who is it that is calling my name and is concerned about my safety?"

"It is I, Ebed-Melech, who has come hither to save you from the lime-pit," came the reassuring reply. Thus was Jeremiah saved from the lime-pit.

4. *Pangs of Hunger*

For three years was Jerusalem besieged by the enemy. The suffering of the people of Jerusalem increased daily. They ran short of water and food, and thousands died from starvation and drought.

One day the inhabitants of Jerusalem filled a casket with pure gold, and let it down by a rope from the walls of the city with a note to the Babylonians, saying: "Take you all this gold for yourselves, and send us in its stead some food." The Babylonian soldiers emptied the casket and filled it with wheat. The following day the casket was again let down, filled with gold, and the Babylonians filled it with barley. The third day, the procedure was repeated, and the Babylonians filled the casket with straw. On the fourth day, a casket full of gold was let down again, but the Babylonians sent it back empty.

Once a very wealthy woman said to her husband: "Pick out one of my jewels or precious stones, go through the streets of Jerusalem, and

see if you cannot find somebody to give you a morsel of bread for it." For hours and hours the husband walked through the streets of Jerusalem, and whomever he met he offered to give a precious stone in exchange for a morsel of bread, but there was no bread to be gotten. Exhausted with hunger and fatigue, the husband fell dead in the street.

"I am very much worried about your father," said the mother to her only son. "Pray go out and look for him."

The son was very much weakened from lack of food, but he went out to look for his father, and after a long search he found his dead body lying in the mud of the streets. "Oh, would that I had died in your stead, my dear father!" exclaimed the son. He prostrated himself upon the corpse of his father, embraced it. and there he too breathed his last.

5. *Jerusalem Captured*

In spite of their terrible sufferings, the inhabitants of Jerusalem refused to surrender to the Babylonian king, for they hoped that the Egyptian king, with whom they had formed an alliance against the Babylonians, would ultimately come to their aid. In fact the hosts of the Egyptian king, Pharaoh Necho, had actually set forth from Egypt to join the Jews against Babylon. But when the Egyptians were on the high seas, God said to the waters of the sea: "Cast up the corpses

of the Egyptians that have been drowned in the Red Sea, and let them float on the surface, so that the Egyptian hosts may see them."

Immediately the surface of the sea was covered with dead bodies, and the Egyptians, astonished at this strange occurrence, asked one another: "Whence do these dead bodies come?"

Thereupon the councillors of Pharaoh said: "These are the corpses of our forefathers who were drowned in the Red Sea on account of the Jews, when the latter had shaken off the Egyptian yoke. Now they have floated to the top of the waters to protest against our going to bring aid to their enemies."

"What!" cried out all the Egyptians as one man, "shall we bring help to those who drowned our ancestors?" So they returned to their country, and left Israel to his own fate.

Although the Jews waited in vain for outside help, they did not lose courage. They fought like lions at bay. Neither hunger, thirst, nor suffering daunted them. There were many, many heroes in the beleaguered city, but one of the most notable was Abika. He, together with a few other heroes, mounted the walls of the city and defended it against the onslaught of the Babylonians. The enemy directed their main attack against Abika and his men, but Abika would catch the arrows that were shot at him in his hands, and would throw them back into the enemy's camp with such

great force that they killed those they struck. With his powerful feet he would stop the stones that were hurled by the enemy at the walls of the city, and would throw them back upon the besiegers, causing a great loss of life among them. But it was the will of God that Jerusalem be captured, and human strength and heroism amounted to naught. A sudden gust of wind swept Abika from the wall, and he died.

There were scarcely any defenders left on the walls of the city, nevertheless the Babylonians were unable to capture it. There was one man in Jerusalem whose good deeds were like a pillar for the city, and whose prayers to God were like a stony wall, and this was no other than the Prophet Jeremiah. As long as he remained within the walls of the city, it could not be captured.

One day, God said to Jeremiah: "Go to thy native place, Anathoth, and take possession of a field, which is thine by right of inheritance."

Jeremiah took this message as a sign that God would be gracious to Judah. "For," said he, "if God is really to destroy His city and exile His people, He would not command me to take possession of a piece of land."

As soon as Jeremiah left Jerusalem, an angel appeared on the wall of the city, and cried out: "Let the enemy come and enter the house, for it is forsaken by its Master. The enemy has permission to destroy it, for the Watchman has gone

away and abandoned it. But let no man boast and say, that he and his army have conquered the city. Nay, a vanquished city have you conquered, a dead people have you killed."

Thereupon Nebuzaradan the commander of the Babylonian army distributed among his warriors three hundred camel-loads of sharp axes, which had been sent to him by Nebuchadnezzar. "Now," he commanded, "rush to the city and with these make a breach in its wall so that we can enter." The Babylonian warriors rushed to the wall of Jerusalem and struck it with their sharp axes, but to their great amazement, the axes were swallowed up by the wall, and no breach appeared in it. On seeing this, the commander was about to give up the attack and raise the siege of the city, and return to his own country, when one of his soldiers approached him and said: "There is a single axe left in my possession; the soldiers have not succeeded in their attempt to make a breach in the wall of the city; now, you take this axe, and try your luck; perhaps you will be able to do more than all of us combined." Nebuzaradan took the axe, and with a single blow he caused a breach in the wall. Immediately, the entire wall was swallowed up by the earth.

6. *The Flight and Capture of Zedekiah*

In the palace of King Zedekiah, there was a secret passage and cave which extended from the

palace at Jerusalem to the city of Jericho. When Zedekiah was informed that the enemy had broken into the city, he took his ten sons and made his escape through the cave. The soldiers of the enemy who were ordered to capture the Jewish king alive, made search for him in every nook and corner of the palace, but in vain. He was nowhere to be found.

Now Jeremiah had once prophesied to King Zedekiah: "You shall be in exile until the day of your death, but you shall never behold the land of your exile with your eyes." When therefore he was in the cave, the king thought that he would escape the doom prophesied for him, because, once in Jericho, he would have no cause to fear the Babylonian soldiers. But the contrivances of man are of no avail against the will of God.

The soldiers who were unable to find Zedekiah, left the city with the idea of making a search for him in the suburbs of Jerusalem, when God sent a deer into their path. They abandoned the search and pursued the game. Skilled as they were in the art of hunting, they could not, to their great surprise, catch this deer. They continued the pursuit until they reached the opening of a cave near Jericho. Now this was the farther opening of the secret passage and just at that moment Zedekiah and his ten sons happened to be emerging from the cave. The Jewish king and his sons were brought before Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar said: "You have forfeited your life for having broken your oath to me."

"O sire," pleaded the captive king, "pray grant me this one wish, and take my life before you take the lives of my sons, that I may be spared the sight of their blood."

"O sire," pleaded the ten princes, "nay, take our lives first, that we may be spared the disgrace of seeing our royal father executed."

But the heartless Nebuchadnezzar, who had decided upon worse things than Zedekiah surmised, made no reply to their pleas. "Deprive this rebellious king of his eyesight," was the command given by Nebuchadnezzar to his attendants. The attendants forced iron lances into the eyes of the Jewish king, but his eyes were not blinded, for they were endowed with superhuman strength. They then forced sharp spears into his wounded eyes, but they were not able to destroy his eyesight.

"Slaughter the ten princes in sight of their father!" ordered the infuriated Nebuchadnezzar.

One by one the ten princes were cruelly slaughtered in sight of their father, and this had the desired effect. The bitter tears shed by the father over the fate of his sons deprived him of his vision. Blind and humiliated, the Jewish king was carried captive to Babylonia, yet he did not see the land of his exile, as Jeremiah had foretold.

7. *The Seething Blood*

When Nebuzaradan forced his way into the Temple, he found the priests engaged in the service, and the Levites singing Psalms and playing their harps. "Cease all these ceremonies," ordered the commander of the Babylonians, "or you shall all meet with a horrible death." The singing immediately stopped, and Nebuzaradan, looking about in the Temple, cried out in great astonishment: "What is the meaning of this blood seething on the floor of the Temple?"

"It is nothing but the blood of the sacrifices we offer to God," replied the terrified priests.

"I can distinguish human blood from that of oxen," said the Babylonian commander. "Murder has been committed in this very holy place of yours. Now, slaughter oxen in this very spot, and see if the blood will cease seething." A great number of oxen were slaughtered and their blood mingled with the blood on the floor of the Temple, but it never stopped seething.

"Now, you must disclose the truth," said the commander, "if not, you shall suffer death by horrible torture."

The horror-stricken priests then narrated the truth: "There once lived among us a prophet of God whose name was Zechariah. He prophesied in the name of God that the Temple would be

destroyed if the Jews continued to do evil. For his candor, he was slain by the people in the Temple, his blood was shed on this very spot, and since then it has not stopped seething."

"I, I will stop the seething of the blood," said the haughty commander. He then ordered that all the Sanhedrin and the learned men be slaughtered on the bloody spot, but the blood of the prophet did not stop seething. He then massacred eighty thousand young priests at the spot where the blood was seething, but still it kept on seething. Thousands of school children were killed on the bloody spot, but the blood of Zechariah still seethed. Finally, Nebuzaradan exclaimed: "Zechariah, Zechariah, the best in Israel have I slaughtered for your sake. Do you desire that I destroy all the people?" Only then did the blood of the Prophet stop seething, and the earth opened and swallowed it.

This incident startled the heartless Nebuzaradan. "For," he said, "if the Jews have been punished so cruelly for having taken the life of a single man, what then shall be my fate, who have killed people by the thousands!"

8. *The Temple Destroyed*

Nebuzaradan and his officers were assembled on the Temple mount, and, on the very spot whereon King Solomon was in the habit of sitting when he

took counsel with the elders, the Babylonians plotted to reduce the Temple to ashes.

While the Babylonians were deliberating, an angel appeared before the throne of Divine Majesty and said: "O Lord, six years ago Thou commandedst me to procure burning coals of fire wherewith the Temple would be reduced to ashes. I thereupon went to the Cherub to whom I said: 'The Lord hath commanded me to fetch coals from thy dominion, but I fear lest I be consumed by thy great fire, therefore I request of thee that thou fetch unto me some of thy burning coals.' All these years, the coals have been in my possession, and I had hoped that the children of Israel would repent of their evil ways, but in vain. Now, O Lord, permit me to set fire to Thy Temple."

"They that trust Me have not entirely disappeared from the midst of Israel," replied God; "therefore, put not forth thy hand against My Temple."

The host of angels rejoiced over the decision of God, but Justice appeared at that moment and said: "Why, O Lord, shall the heathens boast and say, 'We have reduced to ashes the house of the great and holy God of Israel'? Let a fire come down from heaven and reduce Thy Temple to ashes."

Then four angels, each with a flaming torch in his hand, descended from heaven, and set fire to

the four corners of the Temple. Thereupon the Temple rose heavenward, but God addressed it with these words: "My house, it is My decree that thy glory be reduced this day. Descend to earth and a fire will consume thee, but a time will come when I will rebuild thee with fire, and thou wilt then be everlasting."

The high priest, when he saw the flames shoot up, cast the keys of the Temple heavenward, saying: "Here are the keys of Thy house; it seems I am an unworthy custodian." And as he turned he was seized by the Babylonians and slaughtered, and his daughter, too, perished at their hands, her blood mingling with that of her father. The priests and the Levites threw their harps and trumpets into the flames and then they themselves followed, and the virgins who wove the curtains for the sanctuary likewise flung themselves into the fire.

When the flames of the burning Temple shot heavenward, the angels said to one another: "Come, let us descend and comfort the holy city, Jerusalem."

God said: "Will ye comfort the ruined city and not its Builder? Should one comfort the dead son and not the father who mourns for him? But I will not interfere with you. Go down and comfort Jerusalem."

The angels descended and spoke comforting words to Jerusalem, but she refused to be com-

forted. God Himself then descended to comfort the Holy City. He said: "Thy dwellers, O Jerusalem, disobeyed My commandments; they failed to honor their parents; they were guilty of slander and bloodshed, and they took My Name in vain."

Abashed at this rebuke, Jerusalem stopped complaining, but said: "Even when my children are away from me, they will not forget Thee, O Lord; therefore, do not, I pray Thee, forget them and abandon them in their exile."

"I will be their helper and redeemer," God assured the bereaved city.

9. *The Great Lamentation*

The prophet Jeremiah now returned from Anathoth, and from a distance saw smoke curling upward from the Temple mount. He was rejoiced at the sight, for he thought: "My people have repented of their sins, and they are now bringing incense offerings to their God." Upon entering the city walls, however, he learned the truth. Overwhelmed by grief, the prophet exclaimed: "O Lord, Thou didst entice me, and I permitted myself to be enticed; Thou didst send me forth from Thy house that Thou mightest destroy it. Woe to me that this calamity had to befall my people during my lifetime. Many were the prophets that have arisen in Israel and many prophets will still rise, but no such disaster ever befell my people, nor will another such ever befall them."

God Himself was deeply moved by the destruction of the Temple. Accompanied by all the angels, He visited the ruins of His House, and thus He gave vent to His sorrow: "Where are My children? Where are My priests and My beloved ones? But what could I do for you, My children? Did I not send you My prophets to warn you? Yet ye failed to mend your ways."

All the angels wept. The heavens wept, and the sun darkened, and the stars twinkled not. All nature trembled and wept; yea, God Himself wept.

Jeremiah appeared on the scene, and God said to him: "Go, summon Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Moses from their graves. Let them too weep for their children. Let them mourn the loss of My Temple. They know how to mourn."

"Lord of the world," replied Jeremiah, "I know not where Moses is buried."

"Stand on the banks of the Jordan," said God, "and cry, 'Thou son of Amram, arise from thy grave and see how wolves have devoured thy sheep.' "

Jeremiah went to the Double Cave, and spoke to the Patriarchs: "Arise, you are summoned to appear before God."

"Why are we summoned to appear before the Almighty?" asked the Patriarchs in great astonishment.

Jeremiah feigned ignorance, "for," said he to

himself, "if I tell them the real cause, they may cast reproaches upon me and say, 'Woe to the shepherd that such a great disaster has overtaken his flock.'" He therefore replied: "Appear before God, and He will tell you the reason for the summons."

Jeremiah then journeyed on to the banks of the Jordan, and he cried: "Thou son of Amram, arise, thou art summoned to appear before God."

"What has happened this day, that God calls me unto Him?" asked Moses.

"Appear before God and he will tell thee the reason for the summons," replied Jeremiah again.

Thereupon Moses went to the angels, and asked: "Do ye peradventure know the reason why I am called unto God this day?"

"The Temple has been destroyed, and Israel has been banished from his land," answered the heavenly hosts.

Weeping and mourning, Moses joined Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, at the Double Cave and informed them of what had happened to their children. With great lamentation they went together to the ruins of the Temple. Abraham went through the ruins of the Temple, and when he saw that everything was reduced to ashes, he wailed bitterly and said: "Woe to me, what has happened to my children? Why are they different from all other nations, that this has happened to them?"

When the angels in heaven saw Abraham, Isaac,

Jacob and Moses weep, they too wept, saying: "How desolate are the highways to Jerusalem! How deserted are the streets of Zion! O Lord of the world! Thou hast scorned Zion and Jerusalem, once Thy chosen habitation. Thou hast dealt more severely with Israel than with the generation of Enosh, the first idolaters."

"Why are ye weeping and complaining?" asked God of the angels.

"Lord of the world," replied the angels, "Abraham, Thy beloved, has come into Thy house weeping and wailing, and Thou payest no heed to him. When we saw his great distress, we could not refrain from weeping and complaining."

God thereupon turned to Abraham, who wept bitterly and complained:

"Why, O Lord of the world, hast Thou reduced Thy Temple to ashes? Why hast Thou exiled my children and delivered them into the hands of nations that torture them? Be mindful, O Lord, that on this very mountain I was ready to offer Thee my son Isaac as a sacrifice."

"Thy children have sinned," said God; "they have transgressed all the laws of the Torah, they have violated every letter of it."

"And who is there that will bear witness against my children that they have transgressed the Torah?" asked Abraham.

"Let the Torah herself come and testify," replied God.

The Torah came to testify against Israel, but Abraham said to her: "My daughter, dost thou feel no shame? Remember the day on which God offered thee to all the peoples of the earth, and they all refused to accept thee. Then my children came to Sinai and readily accepted thee, and honored thee. And now, on the day of their distress, thou art ready to testify against them. Is not this ingratitude?"

The Torah was impressed by the plea of Abraham. She stepped aside, and would not testify. Thereupon God said: "Let all the letters of the alphabet in which the Torah was written, come and testify against Israel." The letters appeared immediately, and Alef, the first letter, advanced to testify against Israel.

"Thou chief of all letters," said Abraham, "thou comest to testify against my children on the day of their distress. Remember the day on which God revealed Himself on Mount Sinai, and began His words with thee: 'Anoki (I am the Lord thy God.' All peoples and nations rejected thee with disdain; only my children joyfully accepted thee, and honored thee, and now thou comest to testify against them!"

Alef stepped aside and remained silent. Then each letter, in turn, advanced to testify, only to step aside abashed.

Abraham then turned to God and said: "Lord of the world! When I was one hundred years old,

Thou gavest me a son, and when he was in the flower of his age, thirty-seven years old, Thou commandedst me to sacrifice him to Thee. Like a monster, without compassion, I bound him upon the altar with mine own hands. O Lord, be mindful of this, and have pity on my children."

Then Isaac spoke to God saying: "O Lord of the world, when my father told me, 'God will provide Himself the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son,' I did not refuse to do Thy will. I let myself be tied to the altar willingly, and my throat was raised to meet the knife. Be mindful of this, O Lord, and have pity on my children."

Then Jacob spoke to God, saying: "O Lord of the world, my brother Esau sought to take the life of my children, and I risked my life to save theirs. I suffered anguish for them all the days of my life, and coddled them like fledglings emerging from their shells. But now that they had grown great and powerful, Thou regardedst not all my anguish and deliveredst them into the hand of their enemies. Be mindful of a father's anguish, O Lord, and have pity on them."

At last Moses spoke to God, saying: "For forty long years I was a faithful shepherd unto Israel, and when the time came for him to enter the Promised Land, Thou saidst unto me, 'Thou shalt not bring this people into that land; here in the desert shall thy bones drop.' I prayed unto Thee, but Thou didst not hearken unto my supplications.

And now that the children of Israel are exiled, Thou hast sent for me to mourn and lament for them. As the ancient proverb says: 'The good fortune of the master is none for the slave, but the woe of the master is the slave's woe.' "

"Walk before me," said Moses to Jeremiah, "and I will lead the people back to their land; let us see who will venture to raise a hand against them."

"The roads cannot be passed," said Jeremiah, "for they are blocked with corpses."

"That cannot stop me from going thither," said Moses. And following Jeremiah, he reached the rivers of Babylon. "Here is our godly leader Moses!" joyfully cried out the unfortunate captives on beholding Moses. "Lo, the son of Amram has arisen from his grave to redeem us from our captivity!"

At that very moment they heard a heavenly voice cry out: "Moses, it is decreed!"

"O my children," exclaimed Moses, "I cannot redeem you, the decree cannot be altered." The figure of Moses suddenly vanished and left the exiles to their fate.

10. *God Weeps Day and Night*

Nebuzaradan said to Jeremiah: "By the decree of the great and powerful king Nebuchadnezzar, you may remain in Jerusalem. For you are no captive, but a free man."

"I, too, must taste the bitter exile," said the

prophet. "How can I abandon my people in the time of their distress?" And he accordingly followed the Jews who were driven by the Babylonian soldiers over highways strewn with corpses and streaming with blood.

When Jeremiah arrived at the banks of the Euphrates, God said to him: "If thou wouldst remain here, I shall go with them to Babylon; and if thou wouldst go with them, I shall remain here."

"Lord of the world," replied Jeremiah, "if I go with them, what salvation can I bring them? Pray go Thou with them and bring them salvation in time of misery."

Bitter was the grief of the unfortunate captives when Jeremiah informed them that he would return to Jerusalem. They wept and cried: "O father Jeremiah! God has abandoned us. Will you, too, forsake us in the time of our distress?"

"I call heaven and earth to witness," said the prophet, "that if you had wept but once when in Zion, you would not have been driven out, and you would have no cause to weep now."

When the Babylonian officers heard the Israelites wail, they commanded them: "Cease your wailing, or we will destroy every one of you."

"In the dark of the night, when our enemy cannot see us, we shall bewail our exile," said the people to the prophet; "but when the sun shines, do you weep for us, O father Jeremiah, for the enemy would not interfere with you."

"Cursed be the day on which I was born," said the prophet; "the day on which my mother gave birth to me, let it not be blessed!"

"The children of Israel weep at night, and Jeremiah weeps by day, but as for Me, I shall weep both day and night for the slain of My people," said God.

11. *The Promise of God*

When the Babylonians reached the Euphrates, Nebuchadnezzar and his retinue embarked on a vessel and sailed on the river. Musical instruments and song made the hearts of the victors merry and gay, while the officers, priests and sages of Israel walked along the banks of the river, fettered in iron chains, scantily clad and barefoot. The Babylonian king chose four hundred of the best looking youths and girls from among the captives and conveyed them in a vessel which followed closely upon his own. The little children noticed the sad plight of their brothers and sisters who were walking along the banks of the river, raised their small hands to heaven in prayer to God, and shed bitter tears.

"Weep not," said the officers of the vessels, "for we shall bring you to Babylon, and there you will serve our gods, and you will become real Babylonians."

"It is better for us to perish now than to be brought to Babylon," said the girls to one another.

And so saying they embraced one another and together they jumped overboard, and gave up their little souls to God. The youths followed the example of the girls and they, too, jumped overboard and were drowned.

The captives along the banks were proud of the heroism of the four hundred children; they raised their head and looked disdainfully at Nebuchadnezzar and his officers.

"I must subdue the vain pride of the Jews!" cried the infuriated Babylonian king. "Are there not sufficient sacks and sand and stone to be put on the necks of the proud?"

Immediately the Babylonian officers filled thousands of sacks with sand and stones and fastened them to the necks of the men, women and children. The captives bent under the heavy weights and stumbled when they were hurried along by the Babylonian soldiers. They all wept, and the cry of the women and children penetrated to the very heavens.

"I shall turn My creation into chaos again," said God.

"Lord of the worlds," said the angels, "art Thou wroth with the angels, that Thou desirest to destroy the heavenly abode even as Thy earthly dwelling?"

"My anger will be appeased," said God, "when ye will descend and remove the heavy yokes from the necks of My children."

At that moment, Moses returned to the Patri-

archs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and told them of the terrible disaster that had overtaken the children of Israel. They broke out in loud weeping before the throne of Divine Majesty. And Moses, in his great grief, turned to the sun and exclaimed: "Cursed be thou, O sun! Why was not thy light extinguished when the enemy invaded the land of my people?"

"O faithful shepherd," replied the sun, "I swear to you I could not grow dark. The heavenly powers would not permit it. When I was about to darken my light, they dealt me sixty blows with a fiery scourge, and they said, 'Let thy light shine forth.' "

With the suddenness and swiftness of a flash, Rachel stood before the Holy One, blessed be He, and pleaded: "I, a woman, a creature of flesh and blood, of dust and ashes, was not jealous of my sister Leah, my rival, when Jacob took her as his wife. Thou, O God, everlasting and eternal Father, why wast Thou jealous of the idols which are nothing but empty vanities? Why hast Thou driven out my children? Why hast Thou left them at the mercy of their enemies? O Lord, have pity on them, for the sake of Thy great and Holy Name."

Rachel's plea aroused the compassion of God, and He said: "For thy sake, O Rachel, I will not forsake them in the land of their captivity, and I will bring them back to their own land."

12. *The Mysterious Child*

On the day the Temple was destroyed, a certain Israelite was ploughing his field with a pair of oxen, when suddenly one of the oxen lowed and emitted a strange sound. At that moment an Ishmaelite happened to pass by, and he asked the owner of the oxen: "Tell me, what nationality are you?"

"I am an Israelite," replied the man.

"Untie your oxen," said the Ishmaelite, "sit upon the ground and mourn for the destruction of the Temple."

"How do you know that the Temple has been destroyed?" asked the Jew in great astonishment.

"I know it from the peculiar sound emitted by your oxen," replied the Ishmaelite.

At that moment the oxen lowed again, and the Ishmaelite said to the Jew: "Rise and resume the tilling of the ground, for from the lowing of the oxen I know that at this very moment a child has been born who will bring salvation to Israel."

The Jew: "And what will be the child's name?"

The Ishmaelite: "His name will be Menahem."

The Jew: "And what is his father's name?"

The Ishmaelite: "His father's name is Hezekiah."

The Jew: "And where was this child born?"

The Ishmaelite: "In Beth-lehem."

The Israelite thereupon went and sold every-

thing he possessed, and with the money he realized he bought swaddling-cloths. He came to Bethlehem and announced that he had swaddling cloths to sell. All the women came to purchase the cloths, except the woman who had given birth to Menahem.

The swaddling-cloths merchant visited the mother of Menahem, and asked: "Why did you not come to buy swaddling-cloths for your newly-born son?"

"Cursed be the day on which he was born," said the mother of Menahem, "for on the same day the Temple was destroyed."

"Disregard this, good woman," said the swaddling-cloth dealer. "Let us hope that in the child's days the Lord will rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem. Now, pray, take all the swaddling-cloths you may need, and within a few days I shall return and you will pay me for them."

Several days passed, the man again visited the mother of Menahem, and inquired about the newly-born boy.

"I told you," said the mother, "that this infant was born on a very unlucky day. When I left the house for a moment, a big storm arose, and he was carried away on the wings of the wind."

13. *Hiram*

Hiram, the king of Tyre, considered himself immortal, and he sought to make his subjects be-

lieve that he was a god. For this reason he erected four iron pillars in the sea, and on these he built seven artificial heavens. The first heaven was made of glass, and measured five hundred cubits square. On this heaven, he placed huge boulders, which produced the sound of thunder when they rolled on the glass. The second heaven was made of iron, measuring one thousand cubits square. The third was a plate of lead measuring fifteen hundred feet square. The fourth was made of brass, and measured two thousand feet square. The fifth heaven was a plate of copper, measuring twenty-five hundred feet square. The sixth was made of silver, measuring three thousand feet square. The seventh heaven was a plate of pure gold, and measured thirty-five hundred feet square. In the seventh heaven, Hiram set diamonds and pearls which produced the effect of shining stars in the night. Each of these seven heavens was separated from the other by canals. On the sixth heaven Hiram erected his throne, and thus enthroned above the earth, he exclaimed: "Who among the mortals can be compared to me? I am indeed a god and no man!"

Thereupon God appeared to the prophet Ezekiel and said to him: "I made Abraham great and exalted him above others, yet he said, 'I am but dust and ashes.' I gave glory and greatness to Moses and Aaron, yet they said: 'And who are we?' I made David great and famous, and he

said, 'I am ignorant and know not.' The heathen kings to whom I have given power and greatness speak not in this wise. Pharaoh said, 'Who is the Lord, that I should hearken to his voice?' Sennacherib boasted with pride, 'Who of the gods of all the lands could save them from my hand?' Nebuchadnezzar, to whom I have given power, said, 'I will ascend on the heights of the clouds.' And now Hiram proudly says, 'I dwell in the abode of God.' Go therefore and say to him, 'Dust art thou and to dust shalt thou return.' "

Ezekiel was astonished to hear God command him thus, for he knew not how to get to Hiram who was high in the air. While he thus was thinking, a wind arose and carried Ezekiel on its wings to the throne of Hiram, the king of Tyre.

Suddenly, the proud king who claimed to be superior to the rest of men, beheld the prophet Ezekiel beside him. Frightened and amazed, Hiram asked: "Who are you and who has brought you hither?"

"God has brought me hither," answered the prophet, "and He bade me ask you why you are so proud of yourself, and why you consider yourself superior to the rest of men born of woman."

"True, I was born of woman," admitted Hiram, "but there is no one among mortals who can equal me."

"Wherein do you excel other human beings?" asked the prophet.

"I live forever!" asserted the haughty king. "God resides on the sea, and my abode is likewise on the sea. God inhabits seven heavens, and I, too, inhabit seven heavens. I have survived twenty-one kings of the House of David, twenty-one kings of the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes, and I have buried no less than fifty prophets and ten high priests. I am still alive, and I shall never taste death. Go back to your God and say to him, 'Thus said Hiram the king of Tyre: "Thou art afraid of my power, and therefore Thou hast sent Thy prophet to bid me descend from my heavenly throne. I fear Thee not, and I will not obey Thy bidding."

Ezekiel was carried back to earth on the wings of a wind. Soon thereafter a great storm arose which shook the artificial heavens violently, and cast Hiram into the surging billows. As he was at the point of drowning, he said, "I know that on the sea Thou art mightier than I am. But let us match strength on dry land, then we shall see."

Thereupon God ordered the sea to cast Hiram upon the shore, and standing there, the haughty king saw the earth open and swallow the seven heavens together with the pillars upon which they had been erected. Crestfallen, the king of Tyre returned to his country which he found in great confusion.

"What is the cause of all this tumult?" King Hiram inquired.

"Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, is

A great storm arose and cast King Hiram into the surging billows

approaching with a very large army," was the reply.

In the battle that followed, Hiram was conquered, and was made to suffer a cruel death at the hands of King Nebuchadnezzar the victor. Though the king of Babylon was a step-son of Hiram, he had no mercy on him. Daily, Nebuchadnezzar cut off a bit of flesh from the body of the Tyrian king. This flesh, dipped in vinegar, the cruel Nebuchadnezzar forced Hiram to eat, until the haughty and impious king of Tyre passed away.

Chapter XX

IN BABYLON

1. *In the Fiery Furnace*

EBUCHADNEZZAR set up an idol in the valley of Dura, and issued a royal decree that every subject must come and worship it. Any one refusing to obey the edict of the great king of Babylon would suffer the penalty of death by fire.

All peoples bowed down to the idol and worshiped it but three pious men, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, the companions of Daniel, appeared before Nebuchadnezzar and said: "Sire, you are our lord and king and we are your subjects. If you had ordered us to pass through water or fire for your sake, or to risk our lives for the safety of the land, we would do so unhesitatingly. But the decree you have issued commanding us to worship the idol you have set up, that we cannot obey. For our God, the King of kings, has ordered us not to worship any idols, and we cannot disobey Him."

Nebuchadnezzar's wrath was kindled against the three pious men, and he ordered them to be

cast into a red-hot furnace. The executioners made the furnace so hot, that the flames of the fire darted to a height of forty-nine cubits beyond the oven.

Many thousand people gathered to witness the execution, for the three saints were noted men. The spectators were not a little surprised to see that the pious men, arrayed in festive attire, did not display the slightest degree of nervousness as they were being led to certain death.

While the three saints were being led to the furnace, the angels surrounded the throne of Divine Majesty, and said: "O Lord, permit us to descend to earth and save them from death."

"Did these men act thus for your sake?" inquired God. "Nay, they are enduring punishment for My sake; and I will save them with My own hands."

Yurkami, the angel of hail, then said: "O Lord of the world, permit me to extinguish the fire in the furnace." But God declined his offer too.

The angel Gabriel thereupon said: "Lord of the world, in days gone by, Thy servant Abraham was cast into a fiery furnace by Nimrod, of whom Nebuchadnezzar is a descendant. At that time, I offered to save Abraham from death, but Thou didst refuse to accept my offer, saying that Thou wouldst give me an opportunity to save three of Abraham's children from a fiery furnace. O Lord, permit me to descend and save the pious men. I

will cause the fire in the oven to increase, and thereby make the miracle all the greater."

"Thou hast My permission," said God to Gabriel.

At the very moment that the three saints were thrust into the red-hot furnace by the executioners, Gabriel joined them. The angel caused the heat on the outside of the oven to increase to such an extent that it consumed the Babylonian executioners. But within the oven, the angel cooled the fire, and the three pious men were unhurt, even their garments remained uninjured.

The walls of the furnace caved in and the Babylonians saw to their great amazement that the three men were accompanied by a fourth, as if by an attendant, and that they were calmly pacing up and down the furnace. Nebuchadnezzar was filled with dismay, for he recognized Gabriel as the angel who, in the guise of a column of fire, had destroyed the army of Sennacherib before the walls of Jerusalem in the days of Hezekiah.

2. *The End of Nebuchadnezzar*

Nebuchadnezzar, more than once, acknowledged that the God of Israel was the King of kings. He had seen the miraculous escape of the three saints, Hanaiah, Mishael and Azariah. He had heard Daniel, the Jewish captive, whom he loved and admired more than all his servants, tell him the dream that the king had once dreamt

and its interpretation. Yet in spite of all this, the king of Babylon, drunk with victory, became very arrogant and cruel. Like Hiram, his contemporary, he thought himself a god.

One day, Nebuchadnezzar attempted to ascend the throne of Solomon, which had been brought to Babylon at the fall of Jerusalem. But when the Babylonian king ascended the first step of the throne, the lion jumped out, and instead of carrying him to the next step, as it was wont to do for Solomon, it dealt the cruel king such a severe blow on his thigh that he remained crippled for the rest of his life.

Even this failed to humble the haughty Nebuchadnezzar, and he cherished the thought of enveloping himself in a cloud, so that he might live forever apart from men. One day, he heard a heavenly voice calling: "O thou wicked man! Behold, the days of man are threescore years and ten, or perhaps, by reason of his strength, fourscore years. It takes five hundred years to traverse the distance from the earth to the first heaven, and it takes the same length of time to traverse the distance from each one of the seven heavens to the next. How, then, O you mortal, canst thou think of ascending like the Most High above the clouds?"

The haughty Nebuchadnezzar was punished as none before him ever was. He was made to live like a beast among beasts. As far down as his

navel he assumed the appearance of an ox, and the lower part of his body resembled that of a lion. Like an ox he ate grass, and like a lion he attacked and killed many wicked people. The period of time the cruel Nebuchadnezzar had been condemned to live in this manner was seven years, but Daniel prayed to God that the seven years be reduced to seven months, and Daniel's prayer was granted.

During the time Nebuchadnezzar lived among beasts, his son, Evil-merodach, ruled in his stead. When Nebuchadnezzar reappeared in human form again, due to the prayers of Daniel, and found his son occupying his throne, he said: "So you dared to rebel against your own father and you wrest the kingdom from him during his lifetime?" So saying, Nebuchadnezzar ordered his son to be thrown into prison for life.

After reigning for a few years more, Nebuchadnezzar died. The nobles of Babylonia gathered to crown Evil-merodach again their ruler, but the rightful heir to the throne refused to accept it, saying: "I fear that my father is not dead, but that he has disappeared somewhere again, and when he returns, he will accuse me once more of rebelling against him."

Thereupon the people betook themselves to the grave of Nebuchadnezzar, and exhumed the body of the late king. To convince Evil-merodach that his fears were groundless, they mutilated the corpse

of the once mighty king of Babylonia, and dragged it through the streets.

3. *The Writing on the Wall*

When Belshazzar ascended the throne of Babylonia, Cyrus, king of Persia, and Darius, king of Media, rebelled against Belshazzar. After a long struggle, the Babylonian forces gained a decisive victory over Cyrus and Darius. To celebrate his triumph, Belshazzar made a great banquet, and when his heart was merry with drink, he ordered that wine be served in the vessels of the Temple of Jerusalem, which had been brought to Babylon by his ancestors.

Thereupon God said to one of the heavenly host: "Descend to earth and write the fate of the haughty Babylonian ruler on the wall of his palace."

While the king and his guests were drinking wine out of the holy vessels, the angel inscribed on the wall some Aramaic words in Hebrew characters. The words were written in red ink, and the message read: "Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin." The angel was invisible, only his awesome fingers, as they traced the letters on the wall, being visible, and that, too, only to the king.

"O you wise men of my realms!" exclaimed the awe-stricken king. "Can you divine the meaning of this writing?"

All the soothsayers and magicians of the king's

realm admitted that they were unable to interpret the mysterious writing. Thereupon King Belshazzar called for Daniel, who had gained great fame for his wisdom even during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar.

"This is the interpretation of the writing," said Daniel: "Because you have become haughty toward the Lord God and desecrated His holy vessels, He has taken away the kingdom from you, and He has given it to your enemies, Cyrus, king of Persia, and Darius, king of Media."

The interpretation given by Daniel put an end to the merrymaking. The guests scattered in dread and fear, leaving none behind except the king and his attendants. The king thereupon said to his attendants: "You must be very vigilant to-night. Behead any one who attempts to enter the palace, even if the intruder claims to be your king."

At midnight, King Belshazzar left the palace secretly to ascertain if his attendants were executing his orders. No one noticed him, and the king said: "My guards deserve punishment for their neglect." As he was about to return to the palace, he was noticed by one of the guards, who accosted him with the words: "Stand still, you intruder. Who dares enter the palace in the dead of night?"

"I am no intruder," said Belshazzar, "I am the king."

"You are telling a falsehood," said the guard, "the king is sound asleep in his palace." And with these words the guard killed Belshazzar with his sword.

One of the soldiers then recognized Belshazzar, cut off the head of the king, put it in a sack, and walked with it the entire night until he reached the camp of the Persians and the Medes.

"Who goes there?" asked the first sentinel of the Persian army.

"I am a fugitive from King Belshazzar's army," replied the Babylonian soldier. "I have important news to convey to the kings of Persia and Media."

Emptying the sack in the presence of the two kings, the Babylonian fugitive remarked: "Here is the head of King Belshazzar." The soldier thereupon told the kings of the mysterious writing on the wall, and the interpretation of the message by Daniel. The two kings were very much moved by the fugitive's story, and they vowed that if they conquered Babylon they would permit the Jews to return to Palestine, and would grant them the use of the Temple vessels.

Chapter XXI

DANIEL

1. *Daniel in the Den of Lions*

HEN Darius became the ruler of Babylon, he appointed Daniel chief of the king's advisers in the royal court. The high dignity accorded Daniel aroused the jealousy and hatred of many of the king's officers. They sought Daniel's ruin, and finally hit upon a good plan.

One day, they came to King Darius and said: "Verily, sire, you are divine and godly, for never was there a mortal who possessed so much power as you have. Would it not be proper that all your subjects in the lands of Babylon and Media consider you their god? Let a royal decree be issued, that no one address his prayers to any other god but Darius, and that the penalty for violating this decree be death."

Flattered by the idea, King Darius issued an order that for a period of thirty days all his subjects must pray to no other god but to Darius, and that whoever violated the law of the king should be thrown into a den of lions.

The king's officers who were hostile to Daniel and who had brought about the issuing of this edict, began to spy upon Daniel. They encountered a little girl playing in Daniel's court, and they questioned her: "Do you know Daniel who lives in this court?"

"Yes, I know him," was the reply.

"Can you tell us what you see him do?" asked the Babylonian officers.

"He is a peculiar man," answered the girl. "At times he will purchase robes for a poor bride, make a feast for the couple on the day of the wedding, and be merry with the guests. At other times, you can see him following a hearse and mourning for the dead. He gives succor to the poor and speaks kind words to them so that they are not abashed when they receive alms."

While the men were thus conversing with the maiden, they noticed a crowd coming into the court, and they said to her: "Can you tell us what these people have come here for?"

The maiden answered: "Three times a day, Daniel goes up to the attic of his house, and there addresses his prayers to his God. As he prays, he faces the window toward the East. When he has finished praying, he comes down and distributes alms to the poor who gather here thrice daily."

The jealous officers immediately ascended to the spot described by the maiden, and there, to their great delight, they found Daniel on his knees

offering his devotions to God. Daniel did not interrupt his prayers; he did not even so much as turn his head to see who the intruders were.

The officers seized Daniel, dragged him before the king and complained: "O mighty king, the man whom you have selected for the highest office in the kingdom disobeys your orders. When in his private chamber he prays to his own God and not to Darius."

The king himself made every effort to save his friend Daniel from death, and he said: "How can I believe that your charges are true?" But Daniel admitted in their presence that he had always prayed to his own God, and the king was compelled under the pressure brought to bear by the officers to cast Daniel into a pit of lions.

On the day Daniel was to be thrown into the den of lions, the jealous officers ordered the guards not to give any food to the ferocious animals, so that they would devour Daniel as soon as they spied him.

Daniel was thrown into the den and the officers rolled a huge rock on the opening to insure against his escape. Their purpose accomplished, they joyfully returned to their homes. But in spite of their hunger, the wild beasts welcomed Daniel in a friendly manner. Wagging their tails, they approached Daniel and licked his hands.

While this was taking place in Babylon, the prophet Habbakuk, in Judaea, having prepared the

evening meal for the reapers in his field, was on his way to bring it to them, when an angel of God appeared to him and said: "Take this food to Daniel who is in a lion's den in the land of Babylon."

"How can I carry it such a great distance?" asked the prophet in astonishment.

No sooner had the prophet finished his words, than he was seized by his hair, and in a moment was sitting beside Daniel in the lions' den. They dined together, and then the prophet was transported back to his place in Judaea.

Early in the morning, Darius went to the lions' den and called: "Daniel, Daniel!" But Daniel made no reply, for he was at that moment in the midst of his devotions, and could not be interrupted. The Babylonian king was about to lament the sad fate of his friend, when he heard Daniel's voice answering him from the lions' den.

On finding that Daniel was still alive, the king summoned the enemies of Daniel to the pit. "What can you say now?" asked the king, rolling the stone from the opening of the den and pointing to Daniel.

"The life of Daniel was spared," said the sorely disappointed officers, "because the lions were not hungry."

"Well," said the king, "we shall put the beasts to the test with your own persons." Thereupon he ordered the officers to be thrown into the den, and

twenty-two enemies of Daniel were torn to pieces by the hungry lions.

2. *Daniel Kills the Dragon*

The Babylonians served an idol named Bel. The priests who ministered to the idol had spread the report among the worshipers that Bel was a living being and that it had a good appetite. To prove that Bel was a real god, they invited the worshipers to prepare good meals and to place them before Bel in the evening, assuring the worshipers that the food would be consumed by Bel during the night.

Now the priests had built a secret subterranean passage leading to the temple of Bel, and, at night, they would enter the temple with their wives and children and eat up the meals that had been prepared for Bel. The king, too, was greatly impressed by the idol and would prepare the finest meals for Bel.

One day the king urged Daniel to pay homage to the idol Bel, and Daniel replied: "How can I pay homage to the work of the hand of man?"

"This is a real god," replied the king, "for it has an appetite, and eats and drinks like a living being."

"Sire," said Daniel, "I cannot believe that Bel can either eat or drink."

"Then," said the somewhat angered king, "let us put him to the test. I will order food to be

prepared for Bel, and have it set before him to-night."

The king then summoned all the priests to appear before him and Daniel, and he said to them: "Are you certain that, during the night, Bel consumes the food set before him?"

"O lord king," the priests replied, "we are certain that our god Bel does consume the food. And to prove that we are right, let dainty food be prepared and set before him to-night. Let the doors of the temple be securely locked, and the royal seal be placed on them. We are certain that in the morning the food will have disappeared."

Dainty food was prepared and set before Bel that night. But Daniel understood the priests' ruse, and before the doors were locked and sealed he had strewn ashes upon the floor of the temple. When the doors were locked and sealed, the priests said to the king: "If on the morrow the food is untouched, then you may kill us all, sparing none. If, on the other hand, the food is gone, then Daniel, who has spoken falsehoods against our god, should suffer the penalty of death."

During the night, the priests with their families entered the temple through the secret passage and consumed the dainty food set before Bel. With loud laughter they left the temple through the passage whose entrance was underneath the altar. They returned to their homes and waited impatiently for the morning to come.

Early in the morning, Daniel was summoned by the king, and together they went to the temple of Bel, followed by many attendants and priests. The king examined the royal seal on the locks and said to Daniel: "Have these seals been tampered with?"

"No, sire, they have not been tampered with," admitted Daniel.

The doors were then unlocked and thrown open. Finding no trace of the food, the king exclaimed: "O great god Bel! Truly there is no god to excel thee."

Daniel requested that the kings, attendants and priests remain in the doorway, and pointing to the floor of the temple, he asked: "What is the meaning of these foot-prints that I see on the floor?"

"Verily," said the king, "they look like the foot-prints of men, women and children."

"O sire," said Daniel, "let the priests be examined that the truth be ascertained."

The king summoned all the priests, and said to them: "If you do not disclose the truth to me, you shall die a horrible death."

Awe-stricken the priests admitted that they had a secret passage, and that they and their families used to consume the food placed before Bel. By order of the king, the idol Bel and the entire temple were demolished.

The Babylonians next worshiped as their god, a

ferocious dragon that devoured all who approached him. The enemies of Daniel said to the king: "Daniel was able to destroy Bel, because it was lifeless; but let him attempt to meddle with Dragon, and we shall see if he does not meet with death."

The king favored the test, and immediately called for Daniel and said to him: "Will you also belittle the power of our mighty Dragon?"

"O sire," said Daniel, "if you will permit me, I shall cause his death with neither sword nor arrow."

The king gave Daniel the permission he requested, and the enemies of Daniel were delighted. "Now," said they, "the man we detest will surely fall a prey to Dragon."

Daniel had bread mixed with nails and broken pieces of glass fed to the dragon. The creature ate it and perished. The next day, when the Babylonians came to offer the usual sacrifices to their powerful god, they found him dead in the cave. They were very much embittered at the sight of their dead god, and they betook themselves to the palace of the king and demanded that Daniel forfeit his life for having killed their god. But the king not only would not heed their demand, but even punished them, for Daniel was his greatest favorite.

Chapter XXII

THE "END OF TIME"

1. *Daniel's Vision*

DANIEL yearned for the land of his fathers, and did not enjoy the great honors showered upon him by the Babylonian kings. He fasted many days, shed bitter tears and mourned continually for the sad plight of his exiled brothers.

One night an angel appeared to him, and said: "Daniel, why art thou shedding tears?"

"I weep for my exiled people, the burned Temple, and the Holy City," answered Daniel.

"God has sent me to open thine eyes and to reveal to thee that which will befall thy people in the end of time," said the angel. "In thy days," continued the angel, "there will arise a wicked king, who will reign but one year. This one will be succeeded by a godless king, under whose rule the people will suffer greatly. Thereafter many hostile parties will be formed, they will wage war against each other, and this war will continue for four hundred years.

"After that there will reign a king of low stat-

ure and ruddy complexion. He will possess no royal treasures, he will disregard the law of God, and he will proclaim: 'I am a prophet.' He will appear from the South riding on a camel, and he will conquer many peoples. The Israelites will suffer under his rule, and they will be forced to believe in him and his faith. Therefore go thou, O Daniel, and warn the people not to be misled by the words of the false prophet. This king will reign eleven years, then he will return to the land from which he came, and there he will die.

"The next king will be a man of high stature with a long black beard, who will reign three years. He will be succeeded by a king of low stature, who will be cruel to his subjects, and will force the Israelites to abandon their religion and to accept his faith. This king will reign ten years, and after him there will be eight kings in succession; the combined period of their reigns will be ninety-three years, two months and twenty days. The Israelites will suffer greatly during this period, but they will not abandon the Law of God.

"Then another king will arise who shall reign thirteen years. He will be kind to the Israelites, and he will highly esteem their Torah. His successor will build many houses of worship, and in his reign people will pray five times a day. He will proclaim: 'I am a prophet of God! Have faith in me, and you will live.' He will inspire his subjects with confidence in him and cause them

to adopt his belief. This king will reign one year and six months, and the one that shall succeed him will be kind to his subjects, and his coffers will be full of silver, gold and precious stones. He, too, will reign one year and six months, and his son who shall succeed him will reign ten years and die in the East. His son, who shall in turn succeed him, will be eccentric and melancholy, and will cherish a longing to subdue the whole world. He will reign one year and five months, and his son will cause great suffering to mankind. He will wage war against the Ishmaelites. He will expand his kingdom from Babylon to Greece and Turkey, and his reign will be a reign of terror lasting twenty-three years, at the end of which he will die in the East. The three sons of this king, who shall succeed him, will separate: one will go to the East, one to the West, and one will rule in Babylon. The one in the West will find no adherents, neither will the one in Babylon retain his kingship, and the one in the East will conquer the land of his brother in the West. Much blood will be shed in these wars.

"Then there will arise a new king who will decree that all black robes be discarded and white robes take their place. This king will conquer the West, and during the twenty years of his reign, he will spread terror throughout the world. After him there will arise a king from the West, and in his expedition in the East he will slay every

wise and every prominent man. There will be much bloodshed. People will dress in white robes. There will be poverty and confusion in the land. The king will lose control over his subjects, and every one will act as he sees fit.

"A Roman king will thereupon arise who, dressed in red robes, will expand his conquests to Damascus. He will kill the most prominent men of the sons of Ishmael, destroy their houses of worship, and entirely wipe off their kingdom from the face of the earth. The Israelites he will forbid to observe their faith, but they will not hearken to him. They will instead give up their lives for the sake of their religion, and adhere to the Lord their God.

"After this there will arise a king, who will be more cruel and despotic than any of the kings that preceded him. He will be one hundred cubits and eleven spans tall, and ten spans wide. His tremendous height and his hair-covered face will inspire with fear all those who come in contact with him. He will subjugate the entire West, and all those who are fond of war will gather around him and will call him Messiah. The army of Gog and Magog will join this giant king and all men will be awe-stricken because of them. The people of Gog and Magog are extremely ferocious and awe-inspiring. They have four eyes, two in front and two in the back of their heads. They kill with the touch of their hands and with the touch of

their feet. The Israelites will be subjected to great suffering, and they will then experience the worst time in their existence.

2. *The False Messiah*

"In those days there will arise a man from the tribe of Ephraim, who will ascend to the summit of a mountain and will proclaim: "I, I am the Messiah of God. The Lord has sent me to bring good tidings to you, O children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.'

" 'Give us three signs,' the children of Israel will say to him, 'by which we can tell that you are the true Messiah.'

" 'And what are the three signs?' the man will ask.

" 'Take this staff and make it turn into a serpent, as Moses has done,' the children of Israel will say to him. 'Next cause this dry staff to bud and to produce almonds, and lastly, produce the jug containing manna which was concealed by Aaron. If you perform these three signs, we shall know that you are the true Messiah.'

" 'You have come hither to doubt me and to test me!' the man will exclaim angrily. 'I will command my many followers to destroy you all.'

"The children of Israel will then betake themselves into the wilderness where they will pray and weep for forty days and forty nights. The angels Michael and Gabriel will thereupon plead to God

for mercy for His people Israel, and to their entreaty God will reply: 'Go and tell My children that they have done well in not listening to the seducer, and that their redemption is nigh.'

"The two angels will descend to earth and say thus to the children of Israel: 'Praise ye the Lord, for your salvation is nigh. Ye will soon return to the land of your forefathers, and the Lord will appoint over you a king who will rule in righteousness and in justice.' Thereupon the Israelites will shed tears of joy, and they will slay the false Messiah.

3. *The Day of Judgment*

"At that time God Himself will appear, and a loud call will come forth from Zion. Those who have mourned the destruction of the Temple and the loss of the Holy Land, will hear that call to go up to Jerusalem, but those who have forgotten Jerusalem and the Holy Land, will not hear the call. When the children of Israel have gathered in Jerusalem, God will cause the heavenly Jerusalem to descend to earth. This heavenly city will contain three thousand towers, each twenty *ris* (a *ris* measuring 2/15 of a mile) distant from the other, and to every ris there will be twenty-five thousand cubits of emeralds, and precious stones. The houses in Jerusalem will be built of carbuncle. But God will not extend the boundaries of Jerusalem, and He will not bring peace to the

land until the time when the king of Arabia shall be driven out of the land of Israel.

"On the very same day that the heavenly Jerusalem will appear on earth, the heavens will open, and two glistening clouds will descend, upon which King Messiah will ride, with two Seraphim at his right and two at his left. Three years of famine will follow, and all the nations of the earth will fight one another. In this war the kingdom of Edom will fall. God in his vengeance will slay the angel of the Edomites. The children of Israel will be victorious over their enemies and will occupy their lands. They will besiege the city of Tyre for forty days, and at the end of that time, the walls of the besieged city will fall at the cry of the Israelites: 'The Lord our God, the Lord is one.'

"Thereupon the children of Israel will go to Rome, and from there they will bring back the Temple vessels to Jerusalem. They will then say to the king of Arabia: 'Take all the silver and gold we possess, and give us back our Holy Land.' And the king of Arabia will reply: 'You have no share in the Temple and no portion in the land. Now let us sacrifice offerings to God. If He will accept your offering favorably we will accept your Torah. Should he accept our offering, you will accept our religion.'

"When the children of Israel offer their sacrifice, Satan will mention all their sins before God,

and their offering will remain unaccepted. But when the Ishmaelites offer their sacrifice, it will be accepted favorably. 'Now,' the Arabs will say, 'you can see that we are the chosen people, and therefore you must believe in our prophet and in our faith.' But the Israelites will refuse to accept the religion of the Arabs. Thereupon many thousands of the Israelites will be slain by the onslaught of the Arabians, and the remainder of them will flee to the wilderness of Moab and Amon.

"Forty-five days the Israelites will remain in the wilderness and there they will pray to the Lord their God. Then Elijah, the prophet, will appear on the scene, and he will ask: 'My children, what are you doing in this desolate spot?'

" 'Alas! we are lost, entirely lost!' the Israelites will exclaim.

" 'My children, follow me,' Elijah will say, 'for the day of your redemption is at hand.'

" 'Pray give us a sign that you are Elijah, and that Messiah, the son of David, is coming,' the Israelites will demand.

"Elijah will then spread his hands toward heaven, and Moses, the son of Amram, and the generation that died in the wilderness, will appear. Elijah will then spread out his hands again, and Korah and his followers will appear from the abyss of the earth. The earth will break open and there will be seen the Ark of the covenant, the jug

containing manna, and the holy oil of anointment. Elijah will then take hold of the hills and mountains that block the way to Jerusalem and grind them to dust with his hands.

" 'And where is the Messiah?' the Israelites will ask.

"No sooner will they mention his name, than the Messiah will appear and say to them: 'Follow me and you shall see the salvation of the Lord.'

"At that very moment Elijah will fly to all the four corners of the earth and proclaim to the children of Israel that the time of their redemption has come. There will be gladness and joy in the hearts of those who believed in the coming of Messiah and awaited his coming, and sadness and grief in the hearts of those who did not believe in his coming.

"Gog and Magog will then march with their armies against Jerusalem, besiege it for seven and a half days, and capture it. Thereupon the children of Israel will pray to God for deliverance, and He will cause all nations to assemble before the walls of Jerusalem. The nations will remark haughtily: 'To whom does this land belong?' All the kings, together with their vast armies, will then march to Mount of Olives. No war will be waged, and no blood will be shed, but the Lord will appear to them in His glory, and this will cause them all to die like one man. Then all the beasts of the earth and all the fowl of the air will

gather and consume the corpses. It will take the Israelites seven years to burn up all the weapons of war that were used by the united armies, and thereafter there shall be nothing in Israel that can cause death.

4. *The True Messiah*

"The Messiah will rebuild the Temple which shall last forever. At the command of the Messiah, Elijah will ascend Mount of Olives and there blow four times the horn of the ram that had been sacrificed by Abraham as a substitute for Isaac. At the first blow of the horn, the original light that had been created by God on the first day of the Creation will appear. The light shed by the moon will equal that of the sun, and it will cure all sorts of diseases. At the second blow of the horn all the dead will arise from their graves. Father will recognize son, and friend will recognize friend, and together they will ascend the mountain of the Lord, as if on the wings of eagles. At the third sounding of the horn, God in His glory will appear to every living thing. At the fourth sounding of the horn, every mountain will be leveled to the ground. The golden Temple gates will now spring up out of the ground where they had been hidden, and the Temple will then be complete as it was in the days of Solomon.

"Abraham, the father of the Israelites, will then place himself on the right, and Moses and the

Messiah on the left, and all the Israelites will pass in review before them. The Messiah will ask of Abraham: 'Are these your children?'

"'Yes, these are my children,' Abraham will answer. 'These are my children whom the Lord has blessed.'

"The Messiah will turn to Moses and will ask: 'Are these your beloved ones?'

"'Yes I recognize them,' Moses will respond. 'These are the children of God who have observed His laws even when they were scattered among their enemies.'

"Thereupon God will put a crown of glory upon the head of the Messiah, and He will bestow upon him additional wisdom and power, and he will become as an angel of the Lord.

"A fountain will flow out of the Holy of Holies. At its source the fountain will be as thin as a thread, but outside of the Temple it will swell into a stream. No enemy will be able to cross this stream. When the Angel of Death will desire to enter Jerusalem, the water of this stream will rise and block his way. The Angel of Death finding no unclean spot where he could rest will depart from the Holy City.

"God will then augment the beauty of Jerusalem and will extend its boundary lines. God will surround the Holy City with seven walls made of silver, gold and precious stones. These walls will shed a light reaching to every corner of the

earth, and many nations will be attracted by this illumination, and will assemble at the house of God, which shall rise to the very height of the heavens. Then the Lord Himself will appear, and His glory will fill the world forever."

Chapter XXIII

THE RETURN FROM CAPTIVITY

1. *Zerubbabel*

WHEN Daniel grew old, he came before the king and said: "I am no longer fit to perform the duties of my position, because of my advanced age. O sire, pray relieve me of my duties."

"I shall relieve you of your duties," said the king, "if you find me a person worthy to succeed you."

Thereupon Daniel presented Zerubbabel to the king, and he said: "Here is a person worthy to succeed me."

The king gave Daniel many rich presents, and appointed Zerubbabel the highest officer in the land. Zerubbabel and two other high officials made up the bodyguard of the king.

One day, when the king was taking his afternoon nap, one of the three guards said: "Let each of us write down what he considers the mightiest thing in the world. We will then submit what we have written to the king, and he who has written most wisely will be rewarded by the king."

The other two guards agreed, and each one of them wrote down what he thought was the mightiest thing in the world. One wrote: "The king is the mightiest of all things on earth;" the second wrote: "Wine is the mightiest thing there is;" and the third one, Zerubbabel, wrote: "Woman is mightier than anything in the world." The three guards placed what they had written under the pillow on which the head of the king lay, so that he might give his opinion as soon as he awoke from his sleep.

When the king awoke he read the three notes and he summoned all the wise men of his realm and said to them: "Read these notes, and decide which of the statements is the wisest."

"Let us call the three youthful guards," said the wise men, "and let each of them justify his statement."

The three guards were accordingly summoned before the king, and the first of them said: "I wrote that the king is the mightiest on earth, because he is the ruler over many lands and seas. Thousands upon thousands do him homage and tremble at his word. At his command people perish and are made great. He is the ruler of all the creatures in the world."

The second of the guards said: "I wrote that wine is the mightiest thing in the world, because when it takes possession of the senses of a man, he forgets grief and sorrow. Wine overpowers the

greatest hero, and under its influence people cheerfully meet death."

The third guardsman, Zerubbabel, said: "True, the king is mighty and wine is powerful, but the influence of woman exceeds theirs. Samson, the mightiest man that ever lived, met his death because of the insistence of Delilah. Solomon, the wisest and most powerful king of all ages, was in his old age induced by his wives to erect altars to idols."

The assembly of wise men, upon hearing the convincing proof of Zerubbabel, said: "Indeed, woman is the mightiest being in the world." The king was greatly impressed with the wisdom of Zerubbabel, and he said to him: "Ask for aught you wish, and it shall be granted to you."

Zerubbabel said: "O sire, all I desire is to remind my mighty lord of his promise, and that he grant me permission to restore Jerusalem, rebuild the Temple, and return the holy vessels to the place from which they have been carried away."

Darius immediately sent letters to his son-in-law Cyrus, requesting him to aid him in the rebuilding of Jerusalem. Cyrus issued a proclamation to all Israelites, which read: "Whoever among the Israelites desires to return to Jerusalem, will have the support of the mighty kings Darius and Cyrus. The kingly treasuries are open for the purpose of rebuilding the ruins of Jerusalem and the Temple."

2. *God Comforts Jerusalem*

Among the band of returned exiles were the prophets Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi. They encouraged the people in their task of rebuilding the Temple, and each of them had an important place in the supervision of its construction.

Once Zechariah had a vision in which he saw a man carrying a measure in his hand. He asked the man: "Whither are you going with the measure?"

"I am going to measure the metes and bounds of Jerusalem," the man replied.

Thereupon the angels presented themselves before God and said: "Master of the world! Thousands of cities hast Thou given to the nations of the world, and to none hast Thou set limits and bounds. But Jerusalem, the holy city, Thou dost desire to measure, and to set limits to."

When the angels had finished making their plea, Jerusalem came before God and wept: "Alas, has ever a city suffered more than I?" God had compassion upon Jerusalem, and He sent His prophets to comfort her. But she refused to be comforted. God then sent Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to comfort Jerusalem, but she again refused to be comforted. For she said that each one of her comforters at one time or another either had spoken evil of Jerusalem or had had descendants who had helped to destroy her. Next Moses came to com-

fort Jerusalem, but she said: "How can I be comforted by your words, O man of God, seeing that you cursed your children dwelling in my midst?"

Thereupon God said to Jerusalem: "Why dost thou, my daughter, refuse to accept words of comfort from the prophets I have sent to thee?"

"O Lord," said Jerusalem, "Thou hast written in Thy Torah, 'He who hath kindled the fire shall surely pay.' And Thou, O Lord, hast sent down a fire from heaven to consume me. Therefore do I desire to receive words of comfort from Thee, O merciful God."

"Be comforted, be comforted, O My daughter Jerusalem," said God, "for I will rebuild thee, and I will be unto thee a fiery wall."

"Why, then, O Lord, hast Thou sent a young man to measure my boundary lines?" asked Jerusalem.

Thereupon the prophet Zechariah received the Godly message: "Go thou, Zechariah, and speak thus unto the youth, 'Jerusalem needs no limits, for numerous will be her dwellers.'"

3. *Ezra*

Under the leadership of Ezra another company of exiles returned to Jerusalem, and they completed the restoration of the Temple. They built the altar, arranged the wood thereon, and put in order the sacrifices, but they lacked the heavenly

fire which was to consume the sacrifice, and the Torah did not permit them to bring "strange fire" upon the altar of God.

Now in the time of Moses, when the Tabernacle had been completed, a heavenly fire descended on the altar, and this fire was not extinguished as long as the Temple stood. At the time of the destruction of Jerusalem, the prophet Jeremiah hid the heavenly fire, and nobody could remember the spot where it was hidden.

Ezra and the other leaders prayed to God, saying: "O Lord of the world! Thou in Thy great mercy, didst grant us the privilege of rebuilding Thy Temple and of offering sacrifices upon Thine altar. But having no heavenly fire, how can we fulfill Thy will?"

As soon as they finished praying, an old priest suddenly stepped up to Ezra and to the other leaders, and said to them: "I now remember where Jeremiah hid the holy fire. Come with me and I will point out to you the exact spot."

Followed by the elders of Israel, the old priest went to a place outside of Jerusalem, and, pointing to a spot below the town wall, said: "This is the cave where Jeremiah buried the holy fire." The people rolled off a huge rock which covered the mouth of the cave, and from the bottom of the cave there appeared a spring not of water, but of a sort of oil.

Ezra then ordered the priests to take each a handful of the liquid found in the cave and sprinkle it upon the altar. No sooner was this done than a flame shot up which consumed everything found on the altar. This fire spread to the holy vessels, and the priests themselves scattered in fright. But when the flame had purified the vessels, it grew smaller and smaller until it confined itself to the altar. There it remained until the day on which the children of Israel were again exiled from their land.

Ezra used his influence with the people in exile to return to the promised land, but only a small portion of them returned with him. For this reason the prophetical spirit did not show itself during the existence of the Second Temple, and Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi were the last prophets in Israel.

Ezra was a great teacher and leader of his people and he was also endowed with the prophetic spirit. Once he prayed to God and said: "O Lord, why do all the heathen nations prosper, and Thy people Israel always meets with misfortunes?" Thereupon the angel Uriel appeared to him, and explained: "Just as the dead have an appointed time to dwell in the nether world to atone for their sins, so does the evil which thou complainest of have its appointed time, so that Israel may atone for his sins."

4. *The Tempter Captured*

In the days of the great teacher Ezra, there were many sages who were almost as holy as prophets. These men were called the Great Assembly.

One day, Ezra and the members of the Great Assembly, realizing man's sinful nature, prayed to God that He deliver Evil Inclination into their hands so that sin might perish from the earth. When they had finished their prayer, a piece of parchment fell down from heaven, and on it was inscribed the word "Emeth," *truth.*

Ezra and his associates knew now that their combined prayers had been accepted by God. They fasted for three days and three nights that the Tempter of mankind might be delivered into their hands. On the third day of their fasting, Evil Inclination came forth from the Holy of Holies. He resembled a fiery lion in appearance. Zechariah the prophet said to those assembled: "This is the tempter." Thereupon the elders seized him, and during the capture they plucked out one of his hairs. The Tempter uttered a loud cry which was heard at a distance of four hundred parasangs.

"What shall we do with the Tempter?" the assembly asked the prophet.

"The world will not be able to exist without him," replied the prophet. "Therefore be careful

not to take his life. For the present let us put him into a heavy kettle made of lead, and cover it with a heavy lid made of lead."

Thus the Tempter was held captive for three days. During that time there was not an egg to be had in the entire land, for the hens ceased laying. The Great Assembly decided not to do away with the Tempter, for they realized that the world could not exist without him. But they decided to diminish his power. Accordingly, they put out his eyes before setting him free. From that time on the Tempter has been unable to induce men to worship idols nor can he influence men to commit many other terrible sins.

Chapter XXIV

ESTHER

1. *The Feast to the Grandees*

HEN Ahasuerus became king of the Persians and the Medes, he ordered that the throne of King Solomon be brought to him. The king's advisers then said to him: "O mighty king, do not have Solomon's throne brought here for you to sit on, for it bodes evil to any one who dares to make use of it. In time passed, Pharaoh, king of Egypt, made war against Josiah, king of Jerusalem, and captured the throne of Solomon and brought it to Egypt. When Pharaoh made an attempt to ascend the throne, the lion stationed at its side stepped forward and struck the king so violently that he remained lame until the day of his death. Nebuchadnezzar then waged war against the Egyptians and brought the throne to Babylon. He, too, received a mighty blow and was felled to the ground by the lion when he attempted to ascend it. Then the mighty king Darius, your father, defeated the Babylonians, and brought this throne to Elam, in Media. Your father placed the throne in his treas-

ure vaults and said: "No one shall dare touch this holy throne, for whoever touches it suffers severe punishment! Now if your father was careful not to ascend the sacred throne, why should you not heed his warning?"

"Your words are the words of wisdom," said Ahasuerus. He at once issued a decree that men most skilled in the arts and crafts be brought from Tyre and from Alexandria in Egypt. When the skilled artificers were brought before him, he said to them: "You can have all the silver, gold, and precious stones you desire, and make me a throne exactly the same as that of King Solomon."

For three years the artificers worked diligently and only succeeded in making a poor imitation of the throne of King Solomon. So important did Ahasuerus consider the completion of the building of the throne, that he decided to celebrate the event by making a great feast to his grandees.

The king accordingly forwarded a royal invitation to all the grandees of his provinces which numbered one hundred and twenty-seven. The grandees came to the king's palace, all clad in white mantles. For six months the king celebrated, and feasted the nobles of his provinces. The guests were seated on couches made of pure silver and gold, and to impress the guests all the more with his wealth, Ahasuerus invited them to inspect his great treasures of silver, gold and precious stones.

When Ahasuerus boasted of his wealth, one of the guests, a venerable old prince, said to his friends: "If it be your desire, I shall tell you where the king has obtained his treasures."

"We are anxious to know where he obtained them," exclaimed the inquisitive listeners, "pray, tell us."

"Oh, you nobles of Persia and Media," began the venerable prince, "know you that all the vast wealth that you see here is not the personal property of the king, but belongs to the crown. This wealth was acquired by the king in this wise: "The great and mighty Nebuchadnezzar subjugated many nations and with the spoil he had obtained from the vanquished kings, he filled his treasuries with silver, gold and precious stones. Nebuchadnezzar was a great miser and would not have his wealth pass to his heirs. When he felt that his end was drawing nigh, he resolved to sink his immense treasures in the Euphrates rather than have them descend to his heir, Evil-merodach. He accordingly built ships made of copper, filled them with the treasures and sank them somewhere in the Euphrates. Only Nebuchadnezzar knew the place where his treasures had been sunk, and the secret died with him. But when King Cyrus ascended the throne of Persia and gave permission to the Jews to rebuild the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, he was rewarded by God. One day, as Cyrus was sailing on the Euphrates, he discovered

the ships laden with the treasures. Cyrus conveyed the ships to Persia and filled his coffers with the treasure. These are the very treasures which have come into the possssion of our king Ahasuerus and of which he avails himself to make his feast resplendent."

2. *The Feast to the Residents of Shushan*

The feast to the grandees lasted one hundred and eighty days. At the end of that time, Ahasuerus decided to arrange a great celebration for the residents of the capital city Shushan. The feast was held in the royal gardens which had been richly decorated by the pompous Ahasuerus. From tree to tree stretched curtains of byssus, white and sapphire blue, and vivid green and royal purple. These curtains were fastened to supports by cords suspending from round silver beams. The silver beams rested on pillars of red, green, yellow, white, and glittering blue marble. The floors were tiled with crystal and marble set with precious stones. The couches were made of costly draperies, their feet were made of silver, and the rods attached to them were of gold.

The wine and all the other beverages were drunk from vessels made of pure gold, and the wine was in each case older than the one who drank it. The butlers were ordered to serve every guest with wine that had come from his native place.

Now it was the custom in Persia that every one

participating in a feast had to drink a large beaker of wine, far exceeding his drinking capacity. In many cases, a visitor was forced by the butler to drink the full contents of the beaker, resulting either in the loss of his reason or in the loss of his life. Participants would bribe the butlers so that they would not be forced to drink to excess, and the office of butler thus became a lucrative position. Ahasuerus ordered his butlers not to force any guest to drink to excess, but to let every one do as he saw fit.

"It is my aim," said the boastful Ahasuerus, "to please every guest and to allow each one to follow the inclination of his heart." When the king uttered these proud words, God became wroth with him, and said: "Thou fool, art thou able to fulfill every man's desire? If two men love the same woman, canst thou please each of them? If two vessels sail forth together from one port, and if one desires a south wind, and the other a north wind, canst thou produce a wind to satisfy both?"

Ahasuerus ordered the vessels of the Temple be brought in, and their magnificence was so great, that the golden splendor of the other vessels was dimmed. The Jewish guests refused to sit at the table where the vessels of the Temple were displayed.

Queen Vashti, too, made a feast to the women of Shushan and the wives of the nobles. The banquet tendered by her equaled in splendor that

given by her husband. It was held in the halls of the palace, instead of in the garden.

The queen was the daughter of King Belshazzar. When Belshazzar was killed in his own palace, Vashti, alarmed by the confusion that followed, and unaware of the death of her father, fled to the throne-room to seek him. Darius, the king of Media, had already ascended the throne of Balshazzar, and so it happened that Vashti, instead of finding refuge with her father, ran straight into the hands of her father's conqueror. But Darius took pity on her, and gave her to his son Ahasuerus for wife.

3. *The Fate of Queen Vashti*

On the seventh day of the banquet, the king and the nobles became merry with wine, and they began to converse about women. The Persians said: "The charms of the women of our people can be excelled by no other women in the world."

"The Medes replied: "In this world there is no woman superior to that of the Median woman."

"You are all wrong," said the king who was deep in his cups; "my wife is neither a Persian nor a Mede, but a Chaldean, yet she excels any woman in beauty. Would you convince yourself of the truth of my word?"

"Yes," shouted the assembly who were likewise deep in their cups, "let her be brought hither that we may be convinced that your words are true.

But let her appear before us without adornment, so that we may properly judge of her natural beauty and charms."

The king agreed, and he at once ordered his courtiers to summon the queen. He instructed them as follows: "Tell the queen to wear the golden crown on her head, to hold a golden cup in each hand, and to appear thus before the one hundred and twenty-seven princes who were invited as guests to the royal banquet. Let her omit the royal apparel, lest they say that her beauty is not natural but artificial."

Queen Vashti refused to obey the command of the king, and replied thus: "O you fool and madman! You and your princes must have lost your reason by too much drinking. I am Vashti, the daughter of Belshazzar, who was a son of the great and mighty Nebuchadnezzar, who scoffed at kings and to whom princes were a derision; even you would not have been deemed worthy to run before my father's chariot as a courier. Had he lived, I should never have been given to you for wife."

The king was infuriated when he received the queen's daring reply, and he said to the messengers: "Go and tell the queen that if she refuses to obey my order, her punishment shall be immediate death."

When the second summons of Ahasuerus was delivered to Vashti, with the threat of death in case of disobedience, she said to herself: "Well,

the king is drunk, and he really may carry out his threat if I disobey. There is no alternative. I must comply with his mad wish and get ready to go." She at once summoned her attendants to prepare her for her appearance before the king and the princes.

Now God had become displeased with Vashti because of a remark she once had made. At one time Ahasuerus yielded to the request of the Jewish nobles, and agreed to grant them permission to rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. Thereupon Vashti interfered with these reproachful words: "Will you rebuild the Temple which my ancestors have destroyed?" Because of her remark Ahasuerus withdrew his consent.

God now sent down the angel Gabriel to disfigure Vashti's countenance. Suddenly signs of leprosy appeared on her face. She became greatly alarmed upon viewing herself in the mirror, and she told the king's messengers to deliver the following reply: "My lord, it is for your own good that I refuse to obey your order. If the people decide that I do not come up to your description of me, they will pronounce you a liar. If, on the other hand, they do declare me the fairest woman in your realm, then, bewitched by my beauty, they may kill you in order to gain possession of me."

The anger of the king was kindled when Vashti refused a second time to obey his command, and, turning to the Jewish sages, he said: "I request of

you that you pass sentence upon my queen for disobeying my order to appear before me and the one hundred and twenty-seven crowned princes of the realm."

The Jewish sages were unwilling to pass sentence upon the queen, for they thought to themselves: "If we condemn the queen to death, we shall suffer for it as soon as Ahasuerus becomes sober and learns that at our advice she was put to death. But if we plead for mercy now, when he is intoxicated, he will accuse us of being unfaithful to him." They therefore made the following reply: "O sire, from the time the Temple was destroyed and we have been in exile, we have lost the power to give sage advice, particularly in matters pertaining to life and death. Better seek counsel of the wise men of Ammon and Moab, who have ever dwelt at ease in their own lands."

Thereupon Ahasuerus turned to the seven princes of Persia and Media, and said: "Give me your counsel. What shall be done with my queen for refusing to obey my command?"

"O mighty king, it is not against the king alone that Vashti has sinned," said Memuchan, one of the princes, "but also against all the subjects of your great realm. Every woman in your domain will henceforth follow the example of the queen and disobey her husband, knowing that she will suffer no punishment. O sire, it is therefore my counsel that she be made an example of, and that

she suffer the penalty of death for her disobedience, so that, in the future, no woman shall dare to disobey her husband."

"Do you concur in the opinion of Memuchan?" asked the intoxicated king of the six other princes.

"Yes, O king, we agree with him," they answered. And without delay, Queen Vashti was executed by royal decree.

When the king became sober and learned that he had executed his queen at the advice of his seven princes, he flew into a rage against them, and ordered that they, too, be put to death.

4. *Esther Chosen Queen*

The king was greatly grieved over the loss of his queen. He was advised by his councillors to assemble the fairest maidens of the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the realm, and to select from among them one fit to succeed Vashti as his queen. Their advice pleased Ahasuerus and he immediately issued a royal decree that all the fair maidens of his empire be gathered together and brought to the king's palace.

Now in the capital city there lived a very pious man of noble birth whose name was Mordecai. Mordecai had a little cousin named Hadassah, which means Myrtle, and when Hadassah lost both her father and her mother, Mordecai and his good wife took the little orphan into their home and raised her with tender love and care. Hadas-

Queen Vashti was executed by royal decree

sah grew up to be a very fair and virtuous maiden, and people said that she was rightfully named Hadassah, because her good deeds spread her fame far and wide, just as the sweet fragrance of the myrtle pervades the air in which it grows. And because she was a maiden of great charm and beauty, she was likewise called Esther, that is, Venus. For like the morning star, she was at first a hidden light that suddenly shone upon Israel in time of darkness and despair.

When the royal decree was issued ordering the fairest maidens of every province to be gathered together for the king's inspection, Esther was kept concealed in the house of Mordecai, so that the searching eyes of the king's spies might not detect her. But the fame of her beauty and charms had already spread far and wide, and the spies of the king said to Mordecai: "If you fail to produce your cousin, you shall suffer the penalty of death."

Mordecai thereupon brought forth his cousin Esther, who was immediately brought to Hegai, the chief officer of the king's harem. There Esther refused to accept the perfumes, powders and jewels allotted by royal decree to every maiden who was to appear before the king. She even declined the services of the seven maids that were assigned to her. All the other maidens made many demands before they were brought before the king, but Esther made none whatsoever.

When Esther was brought into the presence of

the king, he placed her between two rows of beauties, Median beauties to the right of her, and Persian beauties to her left. But Esther's charms outshone them all. Ahasuerus was thrilled by Esther's remarkable grace and knew her beauty to be unsurpassable as soon as he set his eyes upon her. The king at once decided to set the royal crown upon her head and to make her queen instead of Vashti. He summoned Hegai to the palace and ordered him to take extreme care of Esther, and to give her whatever her heart desired. The king was so pleased with his choice that he at once removed the portrait of his late queen, and replaced it with that of Esther's.

The exalted station in which Esther suddenly found herself did not change her ways and manners. She remained as modest and as silent as she had been till then. Hegai, the chief keeper of the harem, was not at all pleased with Esther's modest ways, and one day, he said to her: "You do nothing to preserve your beauty, and you refuse to eat anything but vegetables, bread and water. Now when the king becomes aware of this, he will blame me for it, and I may be brought to the gallows."

"Have no fears about me, good Hegai," said Esther, "I know that I shall retain my good health upon the diet I have chosen." And indeed Esther was justified in her statement, for she grew more and more charming and beautiful as the days

passed by. Hegai, pleased with the results, loaded Esther down with the most costly jewels to be found at the king's palace.

Mordecai, mindful of the perils to which Esther was exposed, visited the court of the king's harem daily to make sure of his cousin's well-being. One day Mordecai said to Esther: "My child, I know that within a short time you will be crowned queen of the realm. Pray keep your descent and your faith a secret and do not disclose them to any living being."

"Why do you make this request?" asked Esther in great bewilderment.

"You well know that the king is erratic," said Mordecai; "that in his fury he caused the death of his beloved queen. I fear that should the king become angry with you, he will appease his wrath not only by taking your life but also by annihilating all the Jews in his provinces."

Esther saw the wisdom of Mordecai's words, and promised to keep her descent a secret. Ahasuerus made many efforts to learn the secret of her descent from Esther, after he had made her his queen. He arranged great banquets in her honor, but she guarded her secret carefully.

When Esther became queen, Ahasuerus issued a decree to all his peoples saying: "For the sake of my queen Esther, I, Ahasuerus, king of Persia and Media, do hereby release all my subjects from paying taxes and imposts this year."

The king then said to Esther: "You see that for your sake I have done something which has never been done before, and you still refuse to disclose your secret to me. Pray tell me to what nation you belong."

"I know neither my family nor my people," replied Esther, "for I lost my parents in early infancy. I am an orphan, and God, the Father of the fatherless, in His mercy, has brought me up."

5. *The Conspiracy*

One day, King Ahasuerus said to Esther: "Tell me, whose daughter you are."

"Tell me, pray, whose son you are," asked the queen.

"I am the son of the mighty king Darius," replied Ahasuerus.

"If you are a real prince," said Esther, "how could you have put Vashti to death?"

"It was not to gratify my own wish," said Ahasuerus; "I merely followed the advice of the great princes of Persia and Media."

"Your royal predecessors Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar, the kings of Babylon, and even Darius, your father, took no counsel from ordinary human beings," said Esther. "They were guided by prophetic counsel. Daniel was there to advise them."

"Are there any left of these prophets?" asked Ahasuerus anxiously.

"O sire, make search and you will find them," replied Esther.

The result of this conversation was that Mordecai was given the position at court once occupied by Bigthan and Teresh, who were now reduced to the position of butlers to the king. The two ousted officials were indignant and angry at the king, and by way of revenge conspired to take his life.

One day, while Mordecai was sitting in the court of the king, he overheard a conversation between Bigthan and Teresh: "It is impossible to assassinate the king without being detected, for he is surrounded constantly by numerous courtiers and attendants. We can accomplish our purpose much easier by poisoning him. Let us drop poison into his cup of wine before handing it to the king. We are his butlers and we can carry out our plan at any time we see fit."

The two plotters saw Mordecai sitting within hearing distance of them. But they were not afraid to discuss their plan, because they presumed that he would not understand the language they spoke, for they were using their native tongue, the Tarsian. They did not know that Mordecai had been a member of the highest Jewish court, the Sanhedrin, and that, as such, he knew all the seventy languages of the world.

Mordecai at once sent word to Esther that she convey the following message to the king: "The

two butlers, Bigthan and Teresh, have hatched up a horrible plot against the king. They have resolved to take the life of the king by putting poison into his wine." Consequently, the king had the wine, which he was given to drink, tested and it was proven to contain poison. The conspirators were convicted of their crime, and suffered the penalty of death. Thereupon it was recorded in the chronicles of the king, how Mordecai had saved the life of the king by disclosing a mischievous conspiracy against him.

Chapter XXV

HAMAN'S PLOT

1. *The Barber of Karzum*

ONE day, a certain man, Haman by name, settled in the Persian village of Karzum. There he lived for a period of twenty-two years with his wife who bore to him ten sons. Haman was a barber by trade, and with his earnings could scarcely support his wife and children.

Haman decided to leave Karzum and seek his fortune elsewhere. When in the course of his wanderings he arrived in a certain town, he was informed that the Persian general was looking for valiant men to recruit for his army, and that suitable persons would get good wages for their service. Haman lost no time and joined the Persian army.

A terrible war soon broke out in which the army of the Persians suffered a disastrous defeat, and the general and his men fled into the wilderness. There the Persian soldiers suffered from hunger and thirst and many of them perished. Haman tasted no food and drank no water for two days

and two nights. He went around begging the surviving soldiers to have pity on him and let him have a morsel of bread and at least one mouthful of water, but he was rebuffed everywhere.

Greatly discouraged and disappointed, Haman continued wandering aimlessly in the wilderness, when one day he met a Jewish soldier. Haman was extremely faint with hunger and thirst, but he no longer had any strength and courage left in him to beg for help. But the Jewish soldier, noticing Haman's plight, asked: "Tell me what ails you, perhaps I can be of assistance to you."

"I am famished," answered Haman faintly, and so saying, fell exhausted to the ground. This Jewish soldier was none other than Mordecai. Mordecai raised Haman from the ground, and, opening his bag, said: "I still have left a stale morsel of bread and a few drops of water; you may help yourself to half of it."

"You have certainly saved me from sure death," said Haman to Mordecai, "and I know not wherewith to thank you. Here," continued Haman, pulling out some parchment from one of his pockets, "I am going to sell myself to you as a slave, and I will record the sale on this parchment."

But there was no ink and no pen with which to write the document, so Haman obtained a thorn, scratched his flesh with it until blood dripped from the wound, and, using the point of the thorn as a pen and the blood from his veins as ink, he wrote

upon the parchment as follows: "I, Haman, son of Hammedatha of the family of Agag, being a soldier in our king's army, was left without food and drink in the wilderness. I was on the point of dying from hunger and thirst when Mordecai, a Jew, had compassion upon me, shared with me his last morsel of bread and a few drops of water, and thus saved my life. I therefore sell myself forever as a slave to Mordecai."

On the following day, the soldiers in the Persian army were ordered home, for the Indian city that had rebelled against Ahasuerus was defeated. Thereupon Haman returned to his wife and children. After some time, Haman decided again to leave the village with his family and to settle in a place where he might be able to earn a livelihood. In the course of his wanderings, he came upon a treasure, whereupon he bought a beautiful palace in Shushan, and went to live there. Here he gained the reputation of being the richest man in the realm, and thus he became a frequent visitor at the court of Ahasuerus.

2. *Mordecai's Pride*

Haman found favor in the eyes of King Ahasuerus, and he was raised by the king to the highest office in the realm. Ahasuerus also issued an order, that all who saw Haman were to prostrate themselves before him and pay him homage. Thereupon Haman had the miniature of an idol

fastened to his clothes, so that whoever bowed down before him, might worship the idol at the same time.

One day, Haman beheld Mordecai in the court of the king, and he at once recognized his benefactor. Haman then said to himself: "Here is the man to whom I have sold myself as a slave forever. Should he disclose the fact, the king will take away all honors from me, and I shall lose all my glory and my high station in life. Now I am going to pass Mordecai; if he bows to me, it will show that he no longer recognizes me, and I have nothing to fear; but should he refuse to bow down to me, it will prove that he has recognized me as his slave and that therefore he refuses to pay me homage."

When Mordecai beheld the image fastened to Haman's clothes, as Haman approached him, Mordecai said to himself: "If I bow to Haman, then my God will punish me; and if I refuse to bow, then the king will take my life. But I will rather disobey the mortal king than violate the law of the Eternal." So when Haman passed by, Mordecai did not stir from his place.

"Now," thought Haman hopelessly, "he has surely recognized me and has refused to bow to me. There is no way out of it; I must devise ways and means to take my master's life, and thus save myself from everlasting disgrace."

The servants and officials of the king who sat at

the gate of the royal palace said to Mordecai: "Tell us wherein you are better and greater than we are, that we should pay reverence to Haman and prostrate ourselves before him, while you disobey the order of the king and do not bow to him."

"Listen, O you men without understanding," said Mordecai; "hear you my words and then make a proper reply to them. How can I bow to a man born of woman and of but a few days' duration? At his birth, there is weeping, in his youth, pain and groans, all his days are full of trouble, and in the end he returns to dust. Shall I prostrate myself before such a being? I bend the knee before God alone, the only living One in heaven."

"And who is the God before whom you bow?" asked the servants and officials of the king.

"The God whom I fear and before whom I bend the knee is the ever-living One; He holds the earth in His arms; He stretches out the heavens in His might; he darkens the sun when it pleases Him; and illumines the dark; He has set a bound to the waters of the seas, they rage and yet they cannot pass their limit and overflow the land. With His word He created the heavens and the earth. The sun, the moon and the Pleiades run before Him; the stars and the planets are not idle for a single moment; they rest not, they speed before Him as His messengers, going in every direction, to do the will of Him who created them.

To Him alone praise is due, before Him alone must we prostrate ourselves."

"Yet we know well that one of your ancestors bowed down to a human being," said the court officials.

"Who was it?" asked Mordecai.

"Your ancestor Jacob prostrated himself before Haman's ancestor Esau," replied the court officials.

"But I am a descendant of Benjamin," asserted Mordecai, "who was not yet born when his father Jacob bowed down to the ground before Esau."

3. *The Casting of Lots*

Haman's hatred toward Mordecai steadily grew, and he resolved to destroy not only Mordecai but also the whole Jewish people.

When Haman disclosed his design to one of his friends named Zaharan, the latter said: "You with your plot remind me of the story of a little bird who grew angry at the sea and undertook to make it dry."

"Pray tell me about this little bird," said Haman.

"A heron once built its nest along the shore of the sea," began Zaharan, "and there it raised its little ones. One day, when the heron returned from her daily flight to bring some food for her little ones, she found no trace of her nest or of her little ones, for the billows of the sea had risen

very high that day and had swept away her nest together with her young. The heron grew angry at the sea, and in her great wrath she exclaimed: 'O you mischievous sea! I am going to take my revenge on you, and I will dry up your proud billows.' And she immediately started out upon her great task. She took a mouthful of water and spilled it on the sand, and she then took a mouthful of sand and spilled it in the water. Thus she continued repeating the process steadily without allowing time to either eat or drink. 'I have a great task before me,' said the bird, 'I must not permit myself to rest or sleep until my task is done.'

"Another bird noticed the heron at her labor and inquired: 'Pray tell me what you are trying to do?'

" 'This proud haughty sea has destroyed my children,' replied the heron sadly; 'so I will not rest until I dry up its waters.'

"The bird laughed heartily and said to the heron: 'Even if the creatures of the whole world should come to your aid, you would be unable to accomplish your task.' "

"You are talking nonsense," said the somewhat discouraged Haman to his friend. "I am not the silly bird and the Jews cannot be compared to the waters of the seas."

Before proceeding to take steps to carry out his plans for the annihilation of the Jews, Haman

desired to determine the most favorable moment for his undertaking. He decided first of all to cast lots in order to ascertain the day of the week on which his plot stood the best chance of success. Haman, thereupon, requested Shimshai, the scribe, to cast lots for him.

When Shimshai was about to cast lots, the Seven Days of the Week flew up to heaven and presented themselves before God. Sunday was the first one to speak: "O merciful God! On me the heaven and earth came into existence. Upon Israel depends my existence, for were it not for Thy covenant with Israel, there would be neither day nor night, neither heaven nor earth. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Sunday stepped aside and Monday appeared before the Almighty, saying: "On me Thou didst create the firmament, separating the heavenly waters from those remaining on the earth; this is symbolic of the difference between Israel who worships Thee who art in heaven, and the heathens who worship idols that are on earth. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Tuesday, too, protested: "On me Thou didst create the vegetable world. Israel serves Thee, O Lord, by uttering benedictions over each vegetable and fruit, and by giving tithes thereof to the poor and the needy. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Then Wednesday spoke, saying: "O merciful

God, on me the heavenly luminaries were created. Thou didst swear to the ancestors of Israel saying, 'Thy children shall be as the stars of heaven.' O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Thursday, too, protested against the annihilation of Israel, saying: "On me were created all winged fowl, from among which Israel brings sacrifices to Thy great Name. When Israel will be no more, who will bring offerings? O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Friday presented itself before God and said: "On me man was created, and Thou, O Lord, hast said to Israel, 'Ye are men.' Now if Israel is destroyed, why should I remain in existence? O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Finally Sabbath appeared before the Almighty, and said: "It was Thy will, O Lord, that I should be a sign between Israel and Thee. If Thou wilt destroy Israel, then Thou wilt have no need of me. O Lord, destroy me before Thou destroyest Israel."

Thus Haman could find no day of the week opportune for the destruction of the Jews. He then began to cast lots to search for the month that might prove suitable for his sinister undertaking. Thereupon the Twelve Months of the Year presented themselves before God to plead Israel's cause.

Nisan: "In me Israel was redeemed from the

land of bondage, and therefore I am considered as the first month of the year. O Lord, let not Israel be destroyed in me."

Iyar: "O Lord, in me Thou didst cause the first manna to fall for Israel in the desert. In me, also, Amalek suffered his defeat at the hands of Israel. Pray cause no calamity to befall Israel in me."

Sivan: "In me, Thou, O Lord of the world, didst give the Torah to the children of Israel. O Lord, do not bring about the destruction of Israel in me."

Tammuz and Ab: "O Lord of the world, in us misfortune befell Thy people Israel. The enemy entered the Holy City and destroyed Thy Temple and exiled Thy children to strange lands. Let the terrible memories that we bring to them suffice, and let no other misfortune befall them in us."

Elul: "In me, Gideon overcame the Midianites and the Amalekites. In me, the work of building the wall around the city of Jerusalem was completed. Pray, O Lord, let no calamity befall them in me."

Tishri: "In me, the Jewish kingdom was firmly established by the dedication of the Temple built by Solomon. On my tenth day Thou, O Lord, dost forgive Israel his sins, and on my fifteenth day Israel celebrates the Feast of Tabernacles, and praises Thy holy and great Name. O merciful Father, let no misfortune befall the children of Israel in me."

Heshvan: "In me their pious mother Sarah died. O Lord, have compassion on her children as she had compassion on the poor and the needy. In me, too, the building of the Temple at Jerusalem was completed. Pray let not this event be obscured by the annihilation of Israel."

Kislev: "In me, Sihon, king of Bashan, was conquered by the Jews. O Lord, let no misfortune befall them in me."

Tebet: "In me the giant, Og, king of Bashan, was conquered by Israel. O Lord, destroy not Thy children in me."

Shebat: "In me, there occurred the civil war of the eleven tribes against the tribe of Benjamin because of the godless conduct of the Benjaminites. Let the blood shed by the eleven tribes be a sign of their loyalty to Thee, O Lord, and let no harm befall them in me."

And when the twelfth month Adar flew up to heaven and presented itself before the throne of Divine Majesty, God asked: "What happening has occurred in thee, that thou comest up to plead for Israel?"

Adar made no reply, for it was actually a month in which no memorable historic event had occurred to the Jewish people. Therefore, when Haman had finished casting his lots, the month of Adar was found to be the one favorable for his sinister plot against the Jews.

"Now," said Haman to Shimshai, "let us study

the twelve signs of the Zodiac with regard to the Jews. What is the constellation for the month of Nisan?"

"The first constellation is a ram," replied Shimshai.

"Their God will do them no harm during this month," said Haman, "for they are likened to 'scattered sheep.' "

"The constellation for the month of Iyar is a bull," declared Shimshai.

"This will not do," asserted Haman, "because one of their ancestors, Joseph, was called 'the firstling bullock.' "

"The next constellation, that for the month of Sivan, is the twins," declared Shimshai.

"This will not do either," said Haman, "for Tamar bore twins unto Judah, one of their ancestors, and they proved to be righteous men."

"The month of Tammuz is represented by the Crab," declared Shimshai.

"Neither will this do," decided Haman, "for the Crab is called Saratan, the scratcher, and Israel shall scratch sorely all those that oppress him."

"The next constellation, that for the month of Ab, is the Lion," stated Shimshai.

"Daniel who was cast into the den of lions will protect Israel from his enemies," declared Haman.

"The constellation for the month of Elul is the Virgin."

"Israel is compared to a virgin," argued

Haman, "for they refuse to recognize any gods other than their own God."

"Tishri is represented by the Balance."

"Nor will this do," declared Haman, "for Job, the most righteous and God-fearing man, said, 'He weighs me in the balance of righteousness.' It is very likely then that the pious Job will plead for Israel."

"The constellation for the month of Heshvan is the Scorpion," said Shimshai.

"Israel, too, is called the scorpion," said Haman, "and therefore this month will not be propitious."

"Next comes the Archer, representing the month of Kislev."

"The sons of Judah are masters of the bow," argued Haman, "and the bows of the mighty men directed against them will be broken. So this month will not do."

"The month of Tebet is represented by the Goat."

"It was by means of the goat that Isaac's blessing was won by Jacob, the ancestor of the Jews," said Haman, "and therefore no misfortune can be caused to his descendants during this month."

"The next constellation is the Water-bearer, representing the month of Shebat."

"Neither will I be able to do harm to the Jews during this month," said Haman, "for their leader, Moses, acted as water-bearer when he drew water

for the daughters of Jethro to save them from the hands of the shepherds."

"The remaining constellation is that of the Fishes for the month of Adar," announced Shimshai.

"This constellation is certainly most favorable for my plot," exclaimed Haman with elation. "On this month, their leader, Moses, died, and therefore it signifies that I will be able to swallow them as one swallows the fishes."

Whereat the angels in heaven exclaimed: "O thou villain! In the month of Adar, Moses, the great leader of Israel, was born. He shall plead Israel's cause, and thou wilt discover to thy cost that though fishes are sometimes swallowed, they sometimes swallow in turn. This time the fishes will swallow, and not be swallowed."

4. *Haman Denounces the Jews*

To carry out his mischievous designs against the Jews, Haman appeared before Ahasuerus and said: "O mighty king! Permit me, pray, to relate to you some of my experiences. To my mind, they will prove to be of great benefit to the crown."

"You have my permission," said the king.

"O sire," began Haman, "due to your great kindness and graciousness I have been raised to the highest office in the realm. To repay, at least in a small degree, the favors bestowed upon me, I have spared neither time nor money in investi-

gating the various peoples that are subject to the crown in order to determine which of them are loyal and which are unfaithful to the king.

"Most of them, yea all of them, I have found to be loyal. They have patriotic customs and they obey the laws of the king. But there is a certain people, the Jews, dispersed among the peoples in the provinces of the kingdom, who are proud and presumptuous. Their religion differs from the religion of every other people, and their laws are different from the laws of every other land. They pay no heed to our laws and customs, and they do not execute the decrees of the king.

"They spend their time in this wise: The first hour of the day they make preparations for reciting, 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.' The second hour they pass in prayers; the third in eating; the fourth in giving thanks to their God for the food and drink He has granted them, and the fifth hour they devote to their business. In the sixth hour they are ready to return home to rest, and in the seventh, their wives call for them, saying, 'Be seated, you weary ones, you are so exhausted by the cruel king's service.'

"The seventh day of the week they celebrate as their Sabbath. On that day, they do no manner of work whatsoever. They go to their synagogues, pray to their God, read out of their Scroll of the Law, and translate portions of their Prophets.

"In the month of Nisan, they celebrate for eight

days the feast of Passover. They put all the leaven in their homes out of sight, and say, 'This is the day, on which our fathers were redeemed from the land of Egypt.' During these eight days they go to their synagogues, read out of their books, and translate from the writings of their Prophets.

"In the month of Sivan, they celebrate for two days the Feast of Weeks, because they say that on these days their God revealed Himself to their ancestors on Mount Sinai and gave them the Ten Commandments. During this festival, they go to their synagogues, pray to their God, read out of their sacred books, and translate passages from the books of their Prophets. Then they ascend to the roofs of their synagogues from which they throw down apples and roses to the crowd gathered beneath. When these are picked up they say, 'As these apples and roses are gathered, so may we be gathered from our dispersion among the heathen nations.'

"On the first day of the month of Tishri, they celebrate the New Year. They again go to their synagogues, read out of their Torah, and translate passages from the writings of their Prophets. They blow the trumpets, saying: 'On this Day of Memorial may we be remembered by our merciful God for good, and may our enemies be remembered for evil.'

"On the ninth day of the same month they

slaughter cattle, geese, and poultry. They and their wives and their children eat and drink. But as soon as the day is passed and evening draws nigh, they proclaim the arrival of the Great Holy Fast. They fast the whole of that night and all of the next day. They abstain from eating and drinking, and they even force their wives and their little ones to touch no food or drink the entire day. They say: 'On this day our sins are forgiven, and are added to the sum of the sins of our enemies.' They go to their synagogues, read the whole day out of their books, from their Scroll of Law, and translate passages from the writings of their Prophets.

"On the fifteenth day of this month they celebrate the Feast of Tabernacles. They go to our parks, where they cut down palm branches, pluck the fruit of the citron, and cause havoc among the willows of the brook by cutting off branches. They cover the roofs of their houses with foliage, and then they go to the synagogues to pray, and to read out of their books. Then they form a procession and march around with their willow branches, palm branches and the citrons, all the while jumping and skipping like goats.

"In this manner, they waste the entire year with their nonsensical religion, and when they are required to do the king's service, they reply: 'To-day is Sabbath, to-day is a festival.' When we desire to purchase anything from them, they

close their stores and say: 'To-day is a holy day and we are not permitted to desecrate it by doing business.' Now it were best for the king and the government to destroy them all, that they may not think that they are a privileged people and superior to all the peoples in the realm."

When Haman concluded his denunciation of the Jews, the angel Michael appeared before the Lord, saying: "O Lord of the world! Thou knowest well that the children of Israel are accused not of shedding blood, nor of idolatry, nor of immoral conduct, nor of violating Thy laws; they are accused merely of faithfully observing the laws of Thy Torah."

In reply to the plea of Michael, God addressed Himself to Haman: "Thou villain! Thou didst well to enumerate the Festivals of My people, but thou didst fail to mention two new Festivals that are soon to be added to the list—Purim and Shushan Purim."

5. *Ahasuerus Consents*

"I, too, hate the Jews, and would like to destroy them," said the king, "but I fear their God, lest He punish me as He has punished other kings for plotting evil against the Jews."

"O mighty king, you have no cause to fear their God," said Haman, "for He is now old and powerless."

"Call together a council of the wise men of all

nations and tongues," said the king, "and let them tell whether it is advisable to destroy the Jews."

When the wise men of all nations and tongues were called together, they inquired: "O mighty king, who is he that desires to induce you to take so fatal a step? Pharaoh, Amalek, Sisera and others have suffered defeat and have endured frightful sufferings because they mistreated the Israelites. Why should you, O king, make so dangerous an attempt?"

"The God who drowned Pharaoh and who punished the others you have mentioned," said Haman, "is old and feeble now. He can no longer see nor can He protect his people. He is unable to care for His people Israel. For did not Nebuchadnezzar destroy His house, burn His palace, and scatter His people to all corners of the earth? Why did He not interfere with Nebuchadnezzar? Is this not the best proof that He is too old and feeble?"

Encouraged by the silence of the wise men, Haman continued: "If the king's treasury will suffer any loss by the annihilation of all the Jews, I am ready to contribute to the king's treasury ten thousand hundredweights of silver to make up for the loss."

"Haman is certainly loyal to me," thought the king. "He is convinced that the Jews are a menace to my peace, and he is ready to give a large sum of money to rid the land of them." Address-

ing Haman, he said: "Keep the money for yourself, and as far as the Jews are concerned you may deal with them as you see fit. Here is my signet ring, and you may issue any decree you please."

Haman immediately called together the king's scribes, and ordered them to send out a decree in the name of the king, which read:

"From Ahasuerus the Great, to all the peoples, nations and races, greetings of peace. In the assembly of all the rulers of the provinces, the princes of the king, the chiefs and the lords, the eastern kings and the satraps, Haman, the great officer of the king, his second in rank, the first among the grandees, one of the seven princes, and the most distinguished among the nobles of the realm, has reported to me as follows:

" 'In our domain there dwells a people scattered throughout our provinces, whose laws differ from our laws, and who are the most despicable of all nations and races. They claim that their God is the King of the world for ever and ever, and that He will cause the heathen to perish.

" 'They have been an ungrateful people from the beginning of all time. When a famine broke out in the land of Canaan, their ancestor, Jacob, came with a handful of men to Pharaoh, king of Egypt. This good king received the newcomers with great kindness, gave up to them the best of his land, and provided them with food and all they needed. Unmindful of the good done them

by the Egyptian king, they approached him one day, and said to him: "We wish to go to the wilderness, which is a three days' journey from here, to offer sacrifices to our God, and now we beg of you to lend us vessels of silver and gold, and apparel." They loaded their camels with so much wealth that Egypt was emptied of her treasures. When the three days had passed, Pharaoh pursued them to recover the stolen treasures. But what happened? The Jews had among them a great magician, Moses, who had been reared in the court of the king. Moses raised his magic staff and cleft the waters of the Red Sea. The Jews crossed the sea in safety, while Pharaoh and his army were drowned.

" 'When they marched through the wilderness, they fought the Amalekites, a mighty army of trained warriors, and vanquished them. They killed Balaam, the only prophet we heathens have ever had. They destroyed the mighty kings Sihon and Og, and took possession of their lands. They then crossed the Jordan, and, under the leadership of Joshua, they destroyed the thirty-one kings of Canaan and took away their land. Then Saul their first king completely destroyed the Amalekites, sparing no one, not even infants and women. This king was then succeeded by a ruthless king, David by name, who smote the Philistines, the Moabites and the Ammonites. David's son, Solomon, who was extremely wise, built a Temple in

Jerusalem to their God. There they prayed that they might be victorious over the heathen. But after that they sinned against their God, and He delivered them into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, who exiled them to Babylon.

" 'To this day, they are among us, and, though they are under our rule, they refuse to submit to our authority. They accept neither the religion nor the laws of any nation. Their sons do not marry our daughters; they do not worship our gods; they have no regard for our honor, and they refuse to bend the knee before our nobles and grandees. They still consider themselves free men, and hope that in the near future their God will have compassion upon them, destroy us, and bring them back to their own land.'

"This is Haman's accusation, and it is based upon facts which cannot be denied. Therefore I have summoned all the grandees, the princes, and the satraps of the realm, and, after taking counsel together, we have decided to issue a royal decree, which, in accordance with the laws of Persia and Media, is irrevocable, to destroy all the Jews and wipe out the very memory of them from the face of the earth. Accordingly, I hereby command my subjects in each and every one of the hundred and twenty-seven provinces of my empire to kill the Jews, their sons, their wives and little children on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, so that

this wicked people may all perish in one day. Their possessions are to be distributed among the subjects who are loyal to me and who execute my order."

6. *The Heavenly Decree Sealed*

Satan noticed that the Jews were about to repent of their sins and thus avert the impending calamity. He therefore appeared before the throne of Divine Majesty, and said: "Master of the universe! Heed not the supplications and the prayers of the sons of Israel, for it is not because they fear Thee that they now repent, but because they fear the wrath of Haman. Forty-eight prophets and seven prophetesses hast Thou, O Lord, sent to them to make them forsake their evil ways. The prophets warned them day and night of the evil which would befall them, but they paid no attention to the words of the prophets. But, as soon as it becomes known to them that a mortal king, Ahasuerus, has decreed their destruction, they arise as one man to supplicate Thee. Wilt Thou indeed forgive them this time, too, and not punish them for the crime they committed by attending the banquet prepared by Ahasuerus? Disregarding the plea of Mordecai, eight hundred thousand, five hundred and forty-four of them became the guests of the king, and they ate and drank there and committed every folly."

"Should I annihilate the Jews as thou dost request," said God, "who will keep My Law?"

"O Lord, the heavens, the earth and all the angels sing Thy praises day and night," said Satan. "Does not that suffice Thee, and art Thou in need of the praises of a stubborn, sinful people?"

"Go, fetch Me writing materials wherewith I may seal the doom of My people," said God to Satan. "Get Me blood that has been shed by highwaymen among My people; I will dip My seal in it, and stamp the decree of destruction with it."

Highly elated, Satan left the presence of God. He flew from one end of the earth to the other looking for the blood of victims of Jewish lawlessness. But to his great disappointment, he could find no trace of such blood. He then returned to heaven and said: "O Lord, I was unable to find the kind of blood Thou desirest. The sons of Thy people are cowards, and therefore fear to shed blood.

"Go then and fetch Me clay," said God to Satan, "and with it will I seal the decree."

Satan flew to his archives and there he found a piece of clay which was moist with the tears of a widow. The tears had been shed by the widow when she was robbed of her property by a wicked Jew. Satan rejoiced upon finding this piece of clay, and he immediately flew to heaven with it.

"Is there much more of this kind of clay left in

thy archives?" asked God when Satan brought the clay.

"O Lord, there is nothing left of its kind in my archives," answered Satan; "this is the only piece."

God took the clay, and with it sealed the decree of the destruction of His people.

When the Torah heard that the designs of Satan against the Jews had succeeded, she donned her mourning garb, and broke out into bitter weeping before God. Her lamentations pierced the heavens and awakened the angels. They, too, began to wail, saying: "If Israel is destroyed, of what avail is the existence of the whole world? Destroy us as well."

The sun and moon heard the lamentations of the angels, and they, too, donned mourning garbs and wailed bitterly, saying: "Israel suffers at the hands of the heathen only because he observes the Torah and the commandments. Should he then be destroyed?"

The weeping of the Torah, the angels, the sun and the moon reached the prophet Elijah. In great haste, he ran to the patriarchs and to the other prophets, and addressed these words to them: "O ye fathers of the world! The Torah, the angels, the sun, the moon and the stars, the heaven and the earth are weeping bitterly. Your children are about to perish, and ye sit quietly by and stir not a finger to save them."

Thereupon the patriarchs awoke and asked: "Wherefore is God angry with our children?"

"They have sinned against Him," replied Elijah.

"If they have sinned against our Heavenly Father," replied the patriarchs, "who are we that He should annul His decree for our sake?"

The reply of the patriarchs grieved the prophet Elijah and he ran in great haste to Moses, addressing him thus: "O faithful shepherd! thy sheep have been doomed to die all in one day. Pray intercede for them before the Almighty."

"Knowest thou of any saints in the present generation of Israel?" inquired Moses of Elijah.

"I know of only one in the present generation," replied Elijah. "His name is Mordecai."

"Go then to earth," said Moses, "and let the saint of the living generation unite his prayers with the prayers of the saints among the dead, and perhaps the impending doom may be averted from Israel."

But Elijah hesitated and said: "O faithful shepherd! The doom of thy sheep is written and has been sealed by God."

"Is it sealed with blood or with clay?" asked Moses in great anxiety.

"Satan was unable to obtain blood," said Elijah, "but he procured some clay with which the decree was sealed."

"If it is sealed with clay," stated Moses, "then your prayers will be heard in heaven. Make haste,

Elijah, and communicate with the saint of the living generation."

Elijah at once flew down to earth and informed Mordecai of all that was happening on the earth below and in the heavens above.

Chapter XXVI

HAMAN'S DOWNFALL

1. *Mordecai's Dream*

EANWHILE the messengers of the king had left the court in great haste to deliver the decree throughout the provinces, and Haman, his purpose accomplished, departed with great satisfaction. He thought to himself: "My method is not like that of Esau, who desired to slay his brother Jacob but to keep his children as slaves. It is not like the plan of Pharaoh, who sought to destroy only the men of Israel, but to spare the women. Neither is it like the policy of Amalek, who pursued the Jews and smote the hindmost and the feeble, but left the strong and the brave. It is not like the method of Sennacherib, who exiled the Jews and allowed them to reside in a land as good as their own. Nor is it like the plan of Nebuchadnezzar, who carried them away into exile, and settled them near his own palace. I have seen clearly the folly of all these plans, and I have resolved to destroy them all, old and young, so that their very memory may be wiped out."

When Mordecai learned of the decree of the king, he hastened toward the court. On the way he noticed three little Jewish boys who were coming from school, and he asked the first boy:

"Pray, tell me what you have learned in school this day."

The first boy answered: "This is what I have learned to-day: " 'Be not afraid of sudden fear, neither of the desolation of the wicked when it cometh.' "

"What have you learned in school this day?" asked Mordecai of the second boy.

The second boy answered: "This is what I have learned to-day: " 'Let them take counsel together, but it shall be brought to nought; let them speak the word, but it shall not stand; for God is with us.' "

"And what have you learned this day?" asked Mordecai of the third boy.

"I, too, remember the verse I have learned to-day," replied the third boy. " 'And even to old age, I am He, and even to hoary hairs I will carry you: I have made and will bear; yea I will carry and deliver.' "

When Mordecai heard these three verses, he uttered cries of exultation and great joy, and Haman, who happened to pass by just then, asked in great astonishment: "Why this merriment?"

"These little schoolboys have announced good tidings," replied Mordecai.

"On the day of your doom," retorted Haman, "the little ones shall be the first to feel the weight of my hand."

But Mordecai did not remain idle. He called all the people together and he addressed them thus: "O people of Israel, you are dear and precious in the sight of your Heavenly Father! Know you not what has happened? Have you not heard that the king and Haman have resolved to destroy us from the face of the earth? We have no king on whom we can rely, and we have no prophet who can pray for us. There is no place under the sun to which we can flee, and there is no land where we can find safety. We are like sheep without a shepherd, like a ship upon the high seas without a pilot. We are like an infant who is born after the death of his father, and whom death soon robs also of his mother."

Mordecai then called a great prayer-meeting at the gates of the capital city Shushan. Thither they brought the Ark, containing a scroll of the Law wrapped in sackcloth. The scroll was unrolled, and they read the following verses in it: "When thou art in tribulation, and all these things are come upon thee in the latter days, thou shalt return to the Lord thy God, and hearken unto His voice, for the Lord thy God is a merciful God: He will not fail thee, neither destroy thee, not forget the covenant of thy fathers which He swore unto them."

When Mordecai saw that the people were very much touched by these verses and were ready to turn to God, he declared: "My dear brethren! You have undoubtedly heard about the prophet Jonah. God had sent this prophet to announce the destruction of the city of Nineveh. When the announcement was made by the prophet, the king of Nineveh arose from his throne, took off his crown, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. He then proclaimed, as the decree of the king and the nobles: 'Let neither man nor beast, neither herd nor flock, taste anything; let them neither eat food nor drink water, but let them be covered with sackcloth, and let them cry mightily unto God; yea, let them turn everyone from his evil way, and from the violence that is in their hands.' God then repented of the evil he had designed to bring upon the inhabitants of Ninevah. Now, brethren, let us follow their example, let us hold a fast and return to the Lord our God with all our hearts and souls, and He will have mercy upon us."

Mordecai, covered in sackcloth and ashes, passed through the streets of Shushan, crying bitterly over the impending doom of his brethren. Esther knew nothing of what was happening in court, and, when she was told by her faithful maidens that Mordecai had appeared at the gate of the court clothed in sackcloth and ashes, she was filled with alarm. She took new clothes, sent for

Hathach, and said to him: "Give these clothes to Mordecai and learn from him the cause of his mourning."

Mordecai refused to take the clothes offered by Hathach. "God forbid," said he to the messenger of the queen, "that I should array myself in court attire, while my people are exposed to danger. Now," continued Mordecai, "go and tell your queen that Haman, a descendant of Amalek, seeks, like his ancestor, to destroy Israel, and has succeeded in persuading the king to issue a decree throughout the empire, that all Jews, young and old, be killed on one and the same day, namely, the thirteenth day of the month of Adar.

"Now pray ask the queen to appear before the king and plead for the Jews. If she refuses to do so, please tell her of a dream I once had.

"One day I spent a long time in weeping and lamenting over the fate of my people in exile, and prayed to God to redeem Israel and rebuild the Temple. I then fell asleep, and this is the dream I had: I saw a terrible hurricane accompanied by fierce thunder and earthquake. Out of this hurricane two fearful serpents came darting forth. They engaged in a terrible combat, and all the nations of the world who were assembled there, scattered in terror. But one small despised nation was left on the scene. All the other nations sought to destroy it, and the small nation prayed to God for assistance. The fearful serpents were still

Mordecai cried bitterly over the impending doom of his brethren

engaged in their deadly struggle, and no one dared separate them. Suddenly a small fountain of water passed between the two serpents, and separated them. The little fountain rose higher and higher, and grew stronger and mightier as it rose, until it became as large as the very ocean. The clouds and darkness then vanished from the earth, and the splendor of the sun again enveloped the whole world and filled it with peace and truth.

"Tell Queen Esther that this is the same dream that I had narrated to her when she was a little girl. The two serpents are symbolic of Haman and myself, who are now engaged in a terrible struggle which concerns the lives of myriads of people. The little fountain of life represents the Almighty, and the sun radiating light is symbolic of Esther. She must therefore go and seek relief for our people."

"How can I go to the king and plead for our people?" ran the message Esther sent back to Mordecai. "You yourself advised me to keep my Jewish descent a secret. Besides, everyone of the king's subjects is familiar with the palace regulation. Any one who appears before the king without being summoned, suffers the death penalty, unless the king stretches forth his golden sceptre for the uninvited visitor to touch."

And this was Mordecai's reply to Esther: "If you neglect the opportunity to save Israel, you will have to give account for your neglect to the

heavenly court. If you were not destined to save Israel, how could your miraculous history be explained? If not through you, help will come to Israel from other quarters, for God has never forsaken His people in time of need. What cause have you to fear Haman? Does he surpass all his ancestors and predecessors who have perished in their attempt to destroy us?"

Moved by the pleas and arguments of Mordecai, Esther sent to him the following message: "I am prepared to risk my life in this world, in order to gain life in the world to come. But one request I make of you. Let the Jews of Shushan spend three days in fasting and in prayer that I may find favor in the eyes of the king."

Mordecai did as the queen had requested, and proclaimed that all the Jews in Shushan, young and old, men and women, were to pray and to fast for three days.

2. *The Prayers of Mordecai and Esther.*

All the Jews obeyed the proclamation of Mordecai, their leader, and spent three days in fasting and praying to God. Mordecai, too, fasted and prayed, and thus he appealed to God: "O Mighty King and Lord, it is revealed and known unto Thee that not because of my pride and vanity did I refuse to bow and bend the knee to Haman. It was because of my fear for Thee, and because I did not wish to give up the glory that belongs to

Thee to a mortal who will be reduced to dust and worms. Had it not been for Thy Torah and Thy commandments, O Lord, I would have consented to lick the shoes of his feet, in order to save Israel, Thy people, from the hands of their enemies. O Lord! Deliver us from the hands of Haman, and let him fall into the snare which he has laid for Thy people, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that Thy word, spoken by Moses Thy servant, is true: 'And yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break My covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God.' "

For three days Esther tasted neither food nor drink. She laid aside her crown and her royal attire, and she sat on the bare ground. At the end of the three days, she arose and made preparations to go to the king's palace. She arrayed herself in a silken garment, embroidered with gold of Ophir and spangled with diamonds and pearls sent her from Africa; a golden crown was on her head, and on her feet, shoes of gold.

After she had completed her toilet, she fervently prayed to God: "O great God, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! Not because I was without blemish did I deserve to be raised to such a high estate, but, because Thou lovest Thy people Israel, Thou gavest me grace in the eyes of the king so that Thy will might be done through me. And

now, O Lord God, let me find grace in the eyes of the king, let him hearken unto my words, and let him have compassion upon Thy people, who exclaim, 'Holy, holy, holy,' thrice daily before Thee. Save them from the hand of the king, as Thou hast saved Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah from the burning furnace, and Daniel from the den of lions.

"Hearken unto my voice, O Lord God, and see the tears Thy people are shedding, for we are delivered up to the sword for destruction. Look at the children of Thy beloved Abraham who have covered themselves with sackcloth and ashes. Though the elders have sinned, what wrongs have the children committed, and even if the children have committed wrongs, what have the sucklings done?

"O Lord, Thou didst try Abraham with ten temptations, yet didst Thou find him faithful. When Thou didst tell him to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac, he willingly did Thy bidding, nor did he delay to execute Thy command. His left hand held Isaac by the throat, and his right grasped the knife. Deliver us from the hand of the wicked Haman for his sake.

"I am ready to appear before the king and to risk my life for the sake of Thy people. Send Thou an angel of mercy with me on my errand. May the righteousness of Abraham go before me and the resignation of Isaac raise me; may the

charm of Jacob invest me, and the grace of Joseph inhabit my tongue. Let the three days we have spent in prayer and fasting remind Thee, O Lord, of the three days Abraham journeyed to bind his son upon the altar before Thee, and of the three classes of Thy people, Priests, Levites and Israelites, who stood at the foot of Sinai, and said: 'All the Lord hath spoken, will we do, and we will hearken.' "

When Esther concluded her prayer, the holy spirit enveloped her, and she felt refreshed and invigorated after her three days of fasting.

3. *Esther in the Palace*

Esther now betook herself to the king. She was accompanied by three attendants, one walking to the right of her, the second on her left, and the third bearing her train, heavy with the precious stones with which it was studded.

Esther entered the inner court of the king, and stood motionless in front of him. Ahasuerus beheld her, and he was greatly enraged at her appearance without a summons from him. Esther looked into the eyes of the king and noticed the wrath kindled there. She became greatly alarmed, and in her despair she let her head droop.

The courtiers were confident that Esther would be killed for entering the inner court without having been summoned. Already the sons of Haman

were figuring on dividing her jewels among themselves, and casting lots as to who should get her royal purple.

But God in heaven had compassion upon the helpless orphan, who, relying on Him, had risked her life for the sake of her people. God sent down three angels to help her: one enveloped her face with threads of grace, the second raised her head, and the third helped her reach the sceptre of the king. The king, enchanted by her charm, stretched forth his sceptre, and said: "My queen, why are you afraid? Woe to him who dares do you any harm. You must have a very important request to make, else you would not have risked your life. I am ready to grant it, whatever it may be, even to the half of my kingdom."

"O good king," said Esther, "all I ask is that the king and Haman attend a banquet which I propose to give."

After the banquet, the king again said to Esther: "What is your request? It shall be granted to you, even to the half of my kingdom." Then he added, jestingly: "There is but one petition I cannot grant you, and that is the rebuilding of the Temple at Jerusalem. I have given my oath to Geshem the Arabian, Sanballat the Horonite, and Tobiah the Ammonite, not to allow it to be rebuilt, for fear the Jews may rise up against me."

"I request neither half of your kingdom, nor the

rebuilding of the Temple," replied Esther. "All I desire is that the king and Haman come again to a banquet which I propose to give to-morrow."

The king was astonished at Esther's reply, but he said nothing. He simply answered briefly: "Your request is granted."

4. *Haman Prepares a Gallows*

On leaving the palace of the queen, Haman was in the highest spirits. "The queen," thought he, "has invited none to her banquets but the king and me. She indeed esteems me above all the nobles and grandees of the empire." On his way home he saw Mordecai, dressed in sackcloth, sitting at the gates of the court, but Mordecai would not bow to him.

When Haman reached his house, he called together his three hundred and sixty-five advisers and his shrewd wife Zeresh, and he said to them: "My coffers are filled with costly treasures. I am the chief of all the nobles and the grandees. My son, Shimshai, has been appointed by the king as his secretary, and the queen invites only the king and myself to the banquets which she prepares. But all this seems worthless in my sight when I look upon Mordecai, the Jew. What I eat and drink loses its savor, if I but think of him."

"Let him then be killed at once," was the unanimous advice of the counsellors.

"Your advice is good," said Zeresh. "But have you stopped to consider how your intention can be accomplished? How will you put Mordecai to death? If you will cast him into the fire, it will have no effect upon him, for by the aid of his God, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah escaped from the burning furnace unhurt; Daniel was saved in the den of lions; Joseph was freed from prison and became the ruler in Egypt. The Jewish king, Manasseh, was placed in an iron furnace by his enemies, but he prayed to his God, and he was saved. Samson, one of their judges, did more mischief to the Philistines when he was blind than when he had his sight. My advice, therefore, is that Mordecai be hanged, for I know of no case where the God of the Jews ever saved anybody from the gallows."

Haman was very pleased with the advice of his wife, and he said: "Your words are the words of wisdom; let a gallows be prepared and completed before morning, and I will go to the king and ask for permission to hang Mordecai before the thirteenth day of Adar."

Workmen were immediately engaged to erect a gallows. While the work was in progress, Zeresh played upon the cithern, and her sons danced. When the gallows was finished Haman measured it and said: "They will do very well for the hanging of Mordecai, for he is of the same size as I am."

5. *A Night of Waking*

The night during which Haman had the gallows prepared for Mordecai, was a night of mourning and of tears. The Jews all over Persia and Media passed the night in weeping and in lamenting. "Well," said the Jews to one to another, "we thought that Esther would plead for us to the king and save us from the hands of the wicked Haman. But instead of accusing Haman before the king, she has invited him to feast with the king in her palace. Now we know that we can rely upon no one for salvation but our Lord God in heaven." So the Jews spent a sleepless night in prayer.

Esther spent the evening in preparing the banquet for the following day. She passed the night in worry, fearing lest her plan to ensnare Haman in the presence of the king might fail.

Haman, too, spent a sleepless night. He was busy supervising the work on the gallows. And when this was done to his satisfaction, he went to the Jewish house of study where he found Mordecai and thousands of Jewish children. He ordered all the children to be put in chains, declaring: "First I will hang all of these, and then I will hang Mordecai."

When the mothers heard of the evil intentions of the wicked Haman, they hastened to their children with cries and lamentations. They offered

bread and water to the little ones, saying: "You have tasted no bread and have drunk no water for days, now you must take something before you encounter death."

The children laid their hands on their books, and said: "As our teacher Mordecai lives, we shall neither eat nor drink, but we will perish exhausted by our fasting."

They rolled up the sacred scrolls, and handed them to their teachers, with the words: "As a reward for our devotion to the study of the Torah, we thought we should live long, according to the promise made in the Torah. Since we have found no favor in the eyes of God, remove the books!"

Thereupon children, teachers, mothers and fathers, all burst into loud lamentations. Their cries pierced the very heavens and reached God. The angels presented themselves before the Almighty, and said: "O Master of the universe, we hear the voice of tender lambs and sheep."

Then Moses hurried into the presence of God and said: "O merciful God, Thou knowest well that the voices are not of lambs and of sheep, but of the young of Israel, who for three days have been fasting, and now are languishing in fetters. To-morrow these little ones will be slaughtered to the delight of the wicked Haman."

At that crucial moment, God felt compassion for the Israelites, for the sake of the innocent children. He broke the seal of the Heavenly decree against

the Jews, and the decree itself He tore to pieces. Thereupon the angels rejoiced and sang hymns of praise to the Lord, saying: "Praise ye the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever."

Ahasuerus, too, was unable to sleep that night. "What reason does Esther have to invite Haman to every banquet she prepares?" thought the king. "It must be that they are plotting to kill me so that Haman might succeed me to the throne." All at once the king began to feel pains all over his body, and he thought that he had been poisoned. He immediately ordered all those who had charge of the preparation of his food to be hanged.

"O mighty king," pleaded the accused, "we are innocent. Why, Esther and Haman partook of the same food this evening, yet they feel no unpleasant effects."

Thereupon the king pardoned the cooks and the bakers, but again a suspicion began to form in his mind that his queen and Haman were conspiring to put him out of the way. "But," argued the restless king, "if such a conspiracy really existed against me, would not my friends warn me? Is it possible, then, that I have no friends? Is it possible that I have lost their friendship? Perhaps I have failed to reward them for their valuable services."

Thereupon the king ordered the chronicles to be brought to him. In the chronicles all memorable events were recorded. Shimshai, Haman's

son, brought the chronicles, and read out of them to the king. Finally, he reached the place where the incident of the saving of the king's life by Mordecai was recorded. Shimshai desired to skip the page, and read some other part. But to his great amazement, the words made themselves audible, although they were not read by him. The king could hear them plainly: "Mordecai, the Israelite, once saved the king's life, by disclosing the conspiracy of Bigthan and Teresh against the king."

"Was nothing done to reward the faithful Mordecai?" inquired the king of his chamberlains.

"No, nothing was done," was the reply.

6. *Haman Humiliated*

The names of Mordecai and Israel had a soothing effect upon the king, and he fell asleep. In his sleep, he dreamt that Haman, sword in hand, was approaching him with intent to kill him . The king awoke, and just at that moment he beheld Haman, who had not been announced, entering the antechamber. Haman had come to obtain the king's permission to hang Mordecai on the gallows he had prepared.

"Let Haman enter my chamber," ordered the king. When Haman entered, the king said: "Your advice, Haman, always proves to be wise and good. Now tell me how I can reward the man whom I delight to honor."

"Who can be the man the king delights to honor, if not I?" thought Haman. "For I am the chief of all grandees, nobles and satraps." Then, addressing the king, he said: "The favored person whom it is your delight to honor should be arrayed in the king's coronation garments, and the royal crown should be put upon his head. Let him ride on the horse upon which the king himself rode on the day of his coronation. Let one of the grandees of the kingdom run before him, as a herald, and proclaim: 'This is the man whom the king delights to honor.'"

At the mention of the word "crown" the king's countenance changed color, for he recalled the dream about Haman from which he had just awakened. Haman noticed the change in the countenance of the king, and he took care not to mention the word "crown" again.

"Well," said the king to Haman; "your advice is very good. Now hasten to the royal treasure chambers, and fetch from there the following things: A cover of fine purple, a garment of delicate silk, bestrewn with diamonds and pearls and furnished with golden bells, the large golden crown which was brought to me from Macedonia on the day that I ascended the throne, the sword and the coat of mail that were sent me from Ethiopia, and the two veils embroidered with pearls which were sent me as gifts from Africa. Then go to the royal stables, and lead forth the black horse

on which I rode at my coronation, and with all these, seek out Morcedai, for he is the one whom I delight to honor."

Stupefied and alarmed, Haman inquired in a trembling voice: "Which Mordecai shall I seek? There are many men by that name in the realm of the king."

"Mordecai, the Jew," replied the king.

"There are many Jews named Mordecai," said Haman.

"The Jew, Mordecai, who sits in the king's gate," replied the king.

"But there are many royal gates," said Haman, "and I do not know of which one you speak."

"The gate that leads from the harem to the palace," specified the king.

"This man is my enemy and the enemy of my house," Haman pleaded with the king. "I would rather give him ten thousand talents of silver than do him this honor."

"Ten thousand talents of silver shall be given him," stated the king, "but these honors, too, you must show him."

"I have ten sons," pleaded Haman. "I would rather have them run before the king's horses than do Mordecai this honor myself."

"You, your sons and your wife shall be slaves to Mordecai," commanded the impatient king, "but these honors you must show him."

"O my lord and king," pleaded the grief-

stricken Haman, "Mordecai is a common man, and he will not appreciate these honors. Appoint him ruler over a city, or even over a district, rather than that I should do him these honors."

"I will appoint him ruler over cities and over districts," replied the somewhat infuriated king, "but these honors you must show him."

"O good lord and king," pleaded Haman again, "pray be not angry at me. You appointed me chief of all the grandees, nobles and satraps of all your provinces. Now remove me from that high office, and let me be replaced by Mordecai, but spare me the humiliation of doing him these honors."

"The man who saved the life of the king," said the king, "deserves to be the chief of my grandees, nobles and satraps, but these honors must you show him."

"O mighty king, edicts and writings have been issued to all parts of the kingdom, commanding that the nation to which Mordecai belongs shall be destroyed," pleaded Haman. "Recall these edicts and writings rather than that I should do him this honor."

"These edicts and writings shall be recalled," said the angry king, "but this honor must you do him. Now speak no further about the matter, go and execute the will of your king." And turning to Harbonah and Abzur, the king said: "Go you with Haman and take heed that he carries out my wish to the letter."

Haman went to the royal treasure chambers, walking with head bowed, his eyes dim, and his knees knocking against each other. He gathered together the royal insignia, then went to the royal stables and fetched the black horse. With all these, he went to Mordecai who was, then, in the house of study surrounded by his thousands of pupils.

When Mordecai saw Haman approaching, he thought that his last moment had come, and he said to his pupils: "The fetters put on you are much larger than your feet. You can slip out of them and run for your lives, for your enemy is approaching."

"We will not flee," answered all the pupils as one man; "you have been our teacher and guide; in life and in death we desire to be with you."

Mordecai was deeply moved by the answer of his pupils, and he said to them weepingly: "Now let us spend our last moments in prayer to God." With prayers on their lips the pupils embraced one another and they were ready to meet death by the hand of Haman.

When Mordecai had finished his prayer, Haman stepped up to him and said: "Arise, you pious son of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Your sackcloth and ashes availed more than the ten thousands talents of silver which I promised to the king. My talents were not accepted, but your prayers were accepted by your Father in heaven."

"O you wicked Haman," said Mordecai, "does it not suffice you to take my life that you have also come to mock me in my last moments on earth?"

"I have come not to mock you," said the dejected Haman; "here is the royal apparel with which the king has ordered that I array you."

When Haman began to array Mordecai in the king's raiment, Mordecai said: "For three days I have been fasting and have been dressed in sackcloth and ashes. It is unbecoming that I should put on royal apparel in such condition. I cannot put them on before I have bathed and dressed my hair, for I would be insulting the king."

Haman went out to look for a bathkeeper, but there was none to be found. He searched for a barber, but he was unable to find one, for Esther, the queen, had issued an order that bathkeepers and barbers were not to ply their trade on that day. Haman feared to delay the execution of the king's command any longer, for he was watched by the king's courtiers, Harbonah and Abzur. There was nothing for Haman to do but perform, himself, the services Mordecai required. He took a towel, soap and a pair of scissors, he washed Mordecai, and trimmed and combed his hair.

Haman tried to play upon Mordecai's feelings, and, heaving a deep sigh, he said: "The greatest in the king's realm is now acting as bathkeeper

and barber!" But Mordecai remained unmoved by the words of Haman, for he well knew that Haman in his younger days had been the barber of Karzum.

Haman then arrayed Mordecai in the king's robes, put the golden crown upon his head, and requested him to mount the king's black horse. But Mordecai, exhausted by the three days of fasting, was unable to mount the horse unaided, and Haman had to serve him as a footstool.

As soon as Mordecai mounted the king's horse, twenty-seven thousand youths were detailed by the king to march in front of Mordecai. Every one of these youths bore a golden cup in his right hand and a golden beaker in his left.

Finally, Haman took the bridle of the royal horse, led it through the streets of the city, and he together with the twenty-seven thousand youths proclaimed: "Thus shall be done unto the man whom the king delights to honor."

While thus riding in regal state, Mordecai felt no pride, but praised the Lord God with these words: "I will extol Thee, O Lord, for Thou hast raised me up, and hast not made my foes to rejoice over me." Thereupon his pupils joined in with the words: "Sing praise unto the Lord, O you saints of His, and give thanks to His holy name. For his anger is but for a moment; in His favor is life; weeping may tarry for the night, but joy

cometh in the morning." When Esther looked through the window and noticed in amazement what was going on, she said: "I cried to Thee, O Lord; and unto the Lord I made supplication. What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? Shall it declare Thy truth?" And the multitude of Jewish onlookers said: "Depart from me, all ye workers of iniquity, for the Lord hath heard the voice of my weeping. The Lord hath heard my supplication."

All this time, the daughter of Haman was standing on the roof of the house in order to witness the hanging of Mordecai. When she heard the noise of the great multitude assembled in the streets, she thought that the people had gathered for the same purpose. Seeing a man mounted on the king's horse and arrayed in royal apparel, she said to herself: "Surely it must be my father riding on the horse, and the accursed Mordecai leading the horse by the bridle." Raising a vessel filled with slop, she emptied it upon the head of the leader—her own father. When she realized her error, she threw herself down from the roof, and was crushed to death on the street below.

7. *Haman's End*

In spite of the sudden change in his fortunes, Mordecai ended the day in praying and fasting,

as he had begun it. When the procession was over, he took off the royal garments, and again covered himself with sackcloth and prayed till nightfall.

Dejected and humiliated beyond description, Haman returned home. He again summoned his three hundred and sixty-five advisers and his wife, and told them of his sad fortunes. None of the councillors dared speak to Haman in his distress, and neither could Zeresh, his wife, find words of consolation for him. For she said: "If Mordecai, before whom you have begun to fall is of the seed of the Jews, you shall not prevail against him, but shall surely fall before him."

"Why did you advise me to make a gallows for Mordecai?" asked Haman, "if you knew that no one could prevail against the children of Israel?"

"Their God has compared them at times to the dust upon the ground, and at other times He has compared them to the stars in heaven," said Zeresh. "When they fall low they fall as low as the dust on the ground, but when they rise, they rise as high as the stars in the heavens. At first, when I saw Mordecai fall low, I thought he would fall still lower. Now that he is beginning to rise, I know that he will continue to rise to the very heavens."

While they were talking, the king's chamberlains came in and said: "By the order of the king and the request of the queen, you are to come with us immediately to the banquet the queen has pre-

pared." And Haman, at once, set out with them to the palace of the queen.

In the midst of the feast, Ahasuerus again said to the queen: "What is your desire? It shall be granted to you even to the half of my kingdom."

Thereupon Esther, casting her eyes heavenward, spoke as follows: "If I have found favor in Thy sight, O King, and if it please Thee, O King of the world, let my life be given me, and let my people be rescued from the hands of its enemy."

Ahasuerus, thinking that Esther was addressing these words to him, asked in irritation: "Who is he, and where is he, who intends to do you harm?"

Esther, pointing toward Haman, said: "This is the man who sought to harm us, who desired to array himself in the royal garments, ride upon your horse, and wear your golden crown upon his head—this wicked and heartless Haman."

"Haman is a conspirator," cried out the infuriated king. "Come, then, and pronounce judgment upon him."

When Harbonah heard the king's angry exclamation, he said to Ahasuerus: "Nor is this the only crime Haman has committed against the king. He hatched a conspiracy against you together with Bigthan and Teresh, and his hatred toward Mordecai dates back to the time when Mordecai uncovered the foul plot. Out of revenge, Haman has erected a gallows in his yard upon which to hang Mordecai."

Thereupon the king exclaimed angrily: "Let Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he has prepared for Mordecai!" He at once sent for Mordecai, and said: "Now, Mordecai, I charge you with the execution of the royal order that Haman be hanged on the very gallows which he had prepared for you."

Mordecai hastily carried Haman off to the gallows. Haman on the way, pleaded, shedding bitter tears: "Pray, Mordecai, bear no grudge against me, and do not suffer me to perish by hanging, a death which the commonest of criminals meet. Execute me with the sword, and let me die as a man of rank who is guilty of a serious offense. It was really not I who thought of the idea of hanging you on the gallows. It was the advice of my wife and my counsellors."

"God forbid that I should bear a grudge against you," said Mordecai. "I sought to do you no harm, nor did I request the king to hang you on the gallows which you had prepared for me. But I have been charged by the king with the execution of his order, and you well know that no one dare change aught thereof."

By the order of the king, not only Haman, but also his ten sons were hanged on the gallows.

8. *The Second Edict of the King*

The king's fury subsided after Haman and his ten sons had been hanged. He now took the signet

ring which he had removed from Haman's finger, and, giving it to Mordecai, said: "Here is my signet ring. I appoint you in the place and in the stead of Haman, and you may now issue any decree, and sign it with the royal seal."

Mordecai thereupon wrote the following edict in the name of Ahasuerus:

"King Ahasuerus sends this letter to all grandees, nobles, and satraps, and to all the inhabitants on water and land; may your peace be great. Haman, the son of Hammedatha, who was close to the king and into whose hands the government was entrusted, did, by his intrigues and falsehoods, mislead the king, and wrote letters that all the Jews of the realm be killed on one day. It was my impression that Haman had the welfare of his country at heart, and therefore I consented to his petition. But now I have ascertained that this man who came to us and enjoyed our kindness, praise and dignity, was full of intrigues, harbored thoughts of killing the king and of taking away his kingdom. With his own selfish motive in view, he persuaded me to order righteous men to be killed and innocent blood to be shed. Therefore, I have ordered the son of Hammedatha to be hanged on the gallows which he had prepared for Mordecai, who once had saved my life from the plots of conspirators. Now, Queen Esther, for whose sake I have distributed many gifts and on whose account I have granted many concessions to my subjects, is

a cousin of this wise, honest man, Mordecai. I therefore rescind the edict decreeing the death of the Jews, and hereby desire my subjects to honor and befriend the children of Israel."

SOURCES OF THE LEGENDS

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Abba Gurion (Midrash)
Abot (Midrash)
Abot de-Rabbi Natan (Talmud Babli)
Aggadat Shemuel
Alphabet of ben Sira
Aseret ha-Dibrot (Midrash)

Baba Batra (Talmud Babli)
Bamidbar (Midrash Rabbah)
Berakot (Talmud Babli)
Berakot (Tosefta)
Berakot (Yerushalmi)
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Debarim (Midrash Rabbah)
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Ekah (Midrash Rabbah)
En Ya'akob
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Gittin (Talmud Babli)

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Rashi
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Yalkut Hadash
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